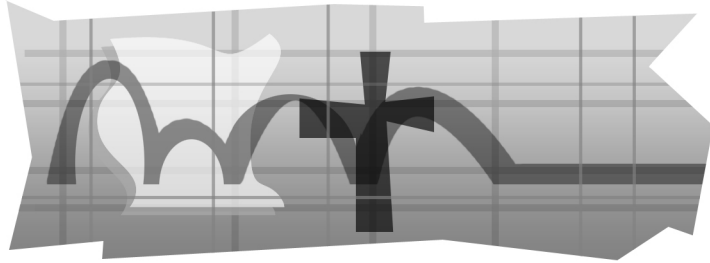


70 Weeks



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Dan. 9:24-27; Ezra 4:7-16; 7:6, 7, 11-17.*

Memory Text: “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” (*Daniel 9:24*).

So far, these few points should be clear: The judgment in Daniel 7 and cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8 are the same event, and it occurs after the 1,260 years.

Second, Daniel 8 ended with the vision of the 2,300 days not explained. Daniel 9 picks up with the end of Daniel 8: Gabriel offers Daniel the explanation he lacked in the previous chapter. Thus, Daniel 8 and Daniel 9 are one: a vision and a partial explanation (*Daniel 8*) and then the rest of the explanation (*Daniel 9*).

This week we continue with Daniel 9, focusing on the amazing 70-week prophecy, which provides powerful evidence not only for the inspiration of Scripture but for the messiahship of Jesus, “the Messiah the Prince” (*Dan. 9:25*), who—as the center of the prophecy, forms the foundation for the 2,300-day prophecy, as well.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 12.*

70 Weeks

As we saw last week, the vision of Daniel 8:14 was a time prophecy, the 2,300 days. Now, in Daniel 9, Gabriel returns and gives him another time prophecy, this time of 70 weeks (*Dan. 9:24*).

Do a little math. Which prophecy is longer, 2,300 days or 70 weeks?

We are presented with two time prophecies juxtaposed with each other, the 2,300 days and the 70 weeks, the 70 weeks being the smaller of the two.

70 weeks

2,300 days

Read the beginning of Daniel 9:24. How does Gabriel first introduce the 70 weeks? What verb does he use?

Though various translations are used for the verb (root is *chatchak*), such as “determined,” or “decreed,” the basic meaning is that of “cut off,” which is how most Hebrew lexicons define it (unfortunately, the word doesn’t appear anywhere else in the Bible, so we can’t see how it is used elsewhere in Scripture). In Ugaritic, a language similar to Hebrew, scholars have noted that the parallel word in that language for *chatchak* means “cut off,” as well. Thus, the basic rendering of the text is “70 weeks are cut off.”

Cut off from what? What else other than from another time prophecy? What other time prophecy? Obviously, the *mareh*, the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14, the longer of the two prophecies.

Thus, we are given two time prophecies: 2,300 days and 70 weeks, and the 70 weeks is to be “cut off” from the 2,300 days.

Suppose you mention to a neighbor that you have five free hours on Sunday. On Sunday the neighbor, after making a direct reference to your five free hours, says that he needs some help to paint a room. “It will take only an hour,” he adds. What’s the immediate implication, and how does that help us understand the link between the two time prophecies of Daniel 8:14 and 9:24?

Key Text: *Daniel 9:24*

Teachers Aims:

1. To highlight the importance of the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and the significance of this event in prophecy.
2. To help class participants affirm that all prophecy focuses on Christ.

Lesson Outline:

Focus on Christ (*Dan. 9:24*)

- A. The 70-week prophecy begins with the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem and ends on a Messianic note. This implies that the prophecy centers on Jesus.
- B. Daniel's 70-week prophecy helps us to arrive at the actual year of the Crucifixion, A.D. 34. This date serves as a powerful and convincing argument in favor of recognizing Jesus as the promised Messiah, thereby testifying to the accuracy of the day-year principle of prophetic interpretation.

Summary: All prophecies point to Jesus Christ, who is the end-time human Deliverer. As we stand now between the past and the future, may we pray that we remain on God's side in the final resolution of the conflict between good and evil.

COMMENTARY

Parallelism and historical linkage connect, and at times telescope, the prophecies of Daniel 2, 7, 8, and 9. In each case, there is a vision followed by an interpretation. Daniel 7 expands on chapter 2, and chapter 8 discusses the restoration of the sanctuary to parallel chapter 7's judgment image in heaven. Daniel 9 telescopes back to chapter 8, when God sends the angel to explain the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14. Now we turn to Daniel 9:20-27 to study the answer to Daniel's prayer, the interpretation of the vision, and the focus on Jesus.

I. Prayer: God's Swift Answer

While Daniel was still praying, the answer came. God does not always answer instantly. Sometimes He delays. Sometimes He remains silent; but however He answers our prayers, the answer is for our good. Daniel's prayer is not selfish: The future of God's people and the destiny of His mission are at stake, so Daniel prays for divine enlightenment. Rare is such a prayer, but certain is God's interest in the destiny of His plans.

“ ‘As soon as you began to pray,’ ” says the angel, “ ‘an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly

The Messiah the Prince

Read carefully and prayerfully Daniel 9:25. What two specific events are directly related to the time element given there? Of those two events, which comes at the beginning of that time element, and which comes at the end?

Here, in this one verse, 69 of the 70 weeks are accounted for. The prophecy begins with the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, and 69 weeks later it ends with “the Messiah the Prince.” Thus, we have two historical events to work with: the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (which would have been of obvious import to Daniel) and “the Messiah the Prince.”

When you understand that the Hebrew word for “Messiah” is translated in Greek as “Christos,” or Christ, to whom then is this prophecy referring? See *Matt. 1:1, 16; 16:16; Acts 3:13-15, 18; 5:30, 31.*

Thus, we can see here a crucial point: This prophecy is centered on Jesus. The first 69 weeks of the prophecy are used to bring us to Jesus, “the Messiah the Prince.” We can say, then, that the prophecy has its foundation in Christ Himself. To the degree, then, that we can have confidence in the messiahship of Jesus is the degree that we can trust the prophecy itself.

What’s crucial to remember, too, is that Seventh-day Adventists hardly are alone in seeing this as a prophecy of Christ. Christians of many denominations have long understood this prophecy as being one of the most powerful evidences for the messiahship of Jesus Christ. After all, we have Daniel, living 500 years before Christ, giving us a time prophecy concerning Christ.

Review other Old Testament prophecies that point to Christ. How should these strengthen your faith in Him and what He has done for us? Put together a study on those prophecies to share with an unbelieving neighbor or friend.

esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision' ” (*Dan. 9:23, NIV*).

Why was Daniel highly esteemed? He stood before God completely dependent, confessed his sin, mediated for His people, trusted Jeremiah's prophecy, and sought the vindication of God's name and promise.

II. The Interpretation of the Dream

The angel next explains the part of the dream not interpreted before: the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14. Note the following points from Daniel 9:24-27: (1) “ ‘Seventy “sevens” are decreed for your people’ ” (*vs. 24, NIV*). Although the Hebrew word *chatak* is translated “decreed” here and as “determined” in other translations, the root meaning of the Hebrew word is “cut off.” From what is 70 weeks to be “cut off” or “ ‘determined’ ” “ ‘for your people’ ”? Obviously from a larger portion of time, which is the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14. Seventy weeks amount to 490 days, or 490 years according to the prophetic year-day principle (*Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:5, 6; see also The Living Bible, Daniel 9:24 and following*). (2) These 490 years out of the 2,300 years are determined for the Jewish people. (3) This period will see an end to sin, atonement for wickedness, and an ushering in of the good news of righteousness. (4) This period also will see the climactic event of redemptive history: The Anointed One will appear and will be cut off (*Dan. 9:26*).

The period of 490 years is divided into three periods: seven weeks, 62 weeks, and one week. When does this important prophetic period begin? “ ‘From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem’ ” until the Anointed One comes will be 69 weeks (*vs. 25, NIV*). These 69 weeks cannot be literal 483 days, for Jesus, the Anointed One, did not come 483 days after the decree to restore the temple was given. So, the period must mean years. The decree to restore the temple was given by Artaxerxes in 457 B.C. (*Ezra 7:7, 8*), and after 483 years (69 weeks of prophetic days) we arrive at A.D. 27—the year Jesus was baptized and launched His messianic mission.

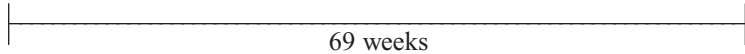
Now let us return to the 70 weeks. This period is divided into three sections. First, seven weeks (49 years) are allotted for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple. From the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 B.C., the Jews began to rebuild Jerusalem. The temple was completed 49 years later, around 408 B.C. Second, 62 weeks (434 years) later, the Messiah appears, which takes us to A.D. 27 when Jesus was baptized. Third, the final week (seven years) is devoted to the confirming of the covenant by the Anointed One. In the midst of the week (*approximately A.D. 31, Dan. 9:27*), the Prince shall “put an end to sacrifice” (*vs. 27, NIV*) by offering Himself as the ultimate sacrifice on the cross.

The Decree

Daniel 9:25 begins with the command to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem and ends with the Messiah, 69 weeks later. And though people might disagree on exact dates, we know for sure that the command to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem was in the sixth or fifth century B.C. and that Jesus lived and died in the first century A.D.

Command to rebuild Jerusalem
fifth–sixth century B.C.

Jesus the Messiah
first century



What immediate evidence do you see here for the day-year principle? Why can the 69 weeks not be taken as literal time?

The crucial issue facing us now is, What is that starting date, the date of the command to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem? Fortunately, as long as we believe that the 69 weeks end with Jesus, we can narrow down the known decrees to only one, the one given in 457 B.C., which was the command by Artaxerxes in the seventh year of his reign (see following daily sections).

Look up these texts (*Matt. 2:1, 19-22; 27:1, 2; Luke 2:1-7; 3:1-3; 23:1-7*). Notice all the historical figures tied in with events surrounding Jesus; through these (and others) we can reconstruct the dates of Christ’s life and ministry.

With this in mind, let’s look at some of the common dates used for the decree in Daniel 9:25.

Take, for example, 538 B.C. Applying the day-year principle to the 69 weeks (483 years) would bring “the Messiah the Prince,” Jesus, to 55 B.C., an impossible date for Jesus.

The same with another common date, 520 B.C. That starting date would bring Jesus to about 37 B.C., an impossible conclusion.

Finally, the only other common date is 444 B.C., which, if used, would place the beginning of Jesus’ ministry about A.D. 39 or 40 and His death sometime in the early A.D. 40s. And though that’s much closer than the other two options, New Testament scholars know that those dates don’t work for Jesus.

III. The Focus of the 490 Years: Jesus

Based on the angel's interpretation of the 70-week prophecy (vss. 24-27), we have three significant events in the history of God's people: the restoration of Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity; the inauguration of the Messiah; and the Messiah's death on the cross. Thus, we see that a central thread runs through the 490-year period—the thread of freedom. Freedom from Babylon, the freedom of God's kingdom being established at the inauguration of the Messiah (*Luke 4:16-19*), and, finally, freedom from Satan.

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Ezra 4:7-16; 7:6, 7, 11-17; Daniel 9:24-27*

- 1 To answer Daniel's questions about the 2,300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14, Gabriel introduces another time period of 70 prophetic weeks, or 490 years. The stated purpose of this period was 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’ ” (*Dan. 9:24, NIV*). Review this verse and reflect on how this prophecy was fulfilled in the centuries leading up to Christ's birth. Read the chapter, “The Fullness of the Time,” in the book *The Desire of Ages* (pp. 31–38), for background.
- 2 The “ ‘Anointed One’ ” in Daniel 9:25, 26 (*NIV*) is an obvious reference to Jesus, the Messiah. Jesus' life not only anchors this prophecy in history; it reveals one of the outcomes of His ministry: “ ‘The Anointed One will be cut off,’ ” and “ ‘he will put an end to sacrifice and offering’ ” (*vss. 26, 27, NIV*). Why did so many, in the ages up to Jesus' birth, misunderstand this prophecy? What is the greatest misconception about Jesus and His ministry now?
- 3 Jesus' earthly life and ministry has been well documented, establishing His place in history and giving credibility to the prophecies that predicted it. Why do so many people's eyes glaze over when they delve into these and other prophecies? Is it possible that we put too much emphasis on time lines and not enough on Jesus? Explain your answer.
- 4 The Jews who returned with Ezra to rebuild Jerusalem fulfilled prophecy just as much as did King Artaxerxes, who issued the decree. What role are we now playing in fulfilling God's promises to a lost world, both as individuals and as a church?

“Building the Rebellious and Bad City”

Daniel 9 gives us a prophecy of “the Messiah the Prince,” who we know is Jesus. Yet, it ties this important prophecy with a specific historical date: the command to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem. Would Scripture give us such an important prophecy without also providing the key to understanding it? Obviously not.

Read Ezra 4:7-16, which deals with events after the end of the Babylonian exile of the Hebrew nation. As you read, ask yourself these questions:

- 1** To whom is the letter being addressed?
- 2** What is the specific complaint against the Jews?
- 3** According to the letter, who sent, or allowed, the Jews to return to Jerusalem in order to do what they were doing?

Look at what’s happening. Sometime after the Jews returned to Jerusalem, a group of Persian officers wrote to King Artaxerxes, complaining about the Jews rebuilding Jerusalem. In the letter they stated two important points: (1) that the city was being rebuilt (*Ezra 4:12*) and (2) that the Jews who were rebuilding had come there because of the king. Said the letter, “Be it known unto the king, *that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations*” (*vs. 12, emphasis supplied*). In other words, the Jews who were rebuilding the city had come there because of King Artaxerxes. He must have issued the decree that allowed them to rebuild their city. The question is, What decree was that?

Despite rebellion and apostasy, God granted mercy and grace to the Hebrew nation, though from a human perspective all seemed lost. What should this tell us about never giving up on anyone, no matter how far he or she has fallen (including ourselves)?

(*Rom. 6:21-23, 2 Cor. 5:16-18, Gal. 5:1*). The focus of Daniel, as every other portion of God’s Word, is the Cross and what God did there for human redemption. “There is one great central truth to be kept ever before the mind in the searching of the Scriptures—Christ and Him crucified. Every other truth is invested with influence and power corresponding to its relation to this theme. . . .

“Hanging upon the cross Christ was the gospel. . . . This is our message, our argument, our doctrine, our warning to the impenitent, our encouragement for the sorrowing, the hope for every believer.”—Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7A, Appendix C, p. 458.

Witnessing

The “fortune cookie,” a baked cracker with a piece of paper bearing a prediction tucked inside, is a staple end-of-meal item in many Chinese restaurants. However, the concept was born not in China but in Los Angeles, California, in the early part of the twentieth century.

If there was someone who saw what you were going to do in life, not just a few days ahead but 500 years ahead of time, then that would be pretty remarkable. Or, it would be the work of God.

That’s the essence of this week’s study: God gave numerous detailed prophecies in the Tanach (the Hebrew name for the “Old” Testament) that point toward the Messiah, the Anointed One, or Christos in the Greek.

OK, you say, that’s nothing unique; there are tons of books with myriads of prophecies. Here’s the difference, however: The prophecies about the Messiah, or Christ, were definite and, just as in the case of the seventy-weeks prophecy, time specific.

Unlike other so-called “prophecies” in history, there’s a way to measure the ones surrounding Jesus. According to scientist Peter W. Stoner, there was only a 1 in 1017 chance of all the prophecies concerning Jesus coming together in that one man, at that one time. Stoner’s 1963 edition of the book, *Science Speaks* (Chicago: Moody Press) addressed the mathematical probabilities of Jesus’ messiahship, and proved—to many readers—that these prophecies were true.

In a world where street-side fortune-tellers, daily newspaper horoscopes, and other predictions capture the attention of millions, the seventy-weeks prophecy is part of a fabric that proves, beyond doubt, that there’s a God who cared about this world and its people so much that He left incontrovertible proof to back up Jesus’ claims.

That’ll beat a fortune cookie any day!

457 B.C.

Yesterday we saw that the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem were rebuilding it. We saw, too, that it was because of King Artaxerxes that they had returned to the city. He must have been the one who issued the decree “to restore and to build Jerusalem” (*Dan. 9:25*), for that’s exactly what they were doing.

Interestingly enough, the Bible mentions only one decree issued by Artaxerxes that could fit these specifications, and that’s in the seventh year of his reign, which can be dated firmly to 457 B.C.

Read *Ezra 7:6, 7, 11-17*. What is going on here in this decree issued by Artaxerxes in regard to what the Jews are doing in Jerusalem?

The book of Ezra is not in chronological order, so the events in Ezra 4 came later than what was in chapter 7. And though nothing in this decree specifically talks about rebuilding the city, it was obviously understood to entail that, because, according to what we read yesterday, that’s exactly what the Jews were doing. Both they and their enemies understood that the decree, issued by Artaxerxes in his seventh year, by which the Jews “which came up from thee to us” (*Ezra 4:12*), must have included the command “to restore and to build Jerusalem.” This is even more obvious because nothing in their letter expressed any idea that rebuilding of the city by the Jews was somehow in contradiction with the decree of the king.

Thus, taken together, Ezra 4 and 7 make it clear that the decree, dated in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes (*Ezra 7:7, 8*) is indeed the “commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem” (*Dan. 9:25*).

This, too, can be firmly dated at 457 B.C. (and though some argue for 458, the difference entails only a six-month discrepancy).

Also, if one believed that Jesus were “the Messiah the Prince,” this date would work perfectly. In other words, Jesus is our Surety in regard to this prophecy.

Why should Jesus be our Surety in everything regarding our faith?

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: “Dr. George Sweeting once estimated that ‘more than a fourth of the Bible is predictive prophecy. . . . Both the Old and New Testaments are full of promises about the return of Jesus Christ. Over 1800 references appear in the O.T., and seventeen O.T. books give prominence to this theme. Of the 260 chapters in the N.T., there are more than 300 references to the Lord’s return—one out of every 30 verses. Twenty-three of the 27 N.T. books refer to this great event. . . . For every prophecy on the first coming of Christ, there are 8 on Christ’s second coming.’ ” —*Today in the Word*, Moody Bible Institute, December 1989, p. 40. <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/prophecy.htm> (accessed February 23, 2005).

Thought Questions:

1 The book of Daniel is riddled with beasts, giant statues, and other vivid imagery. Yet, throughout the book Christ remains the underlying focus. How does the 70-week prophecy, in particular, illustrate this point? What specific steps can we take to keep Christ the underlying focus of our church; that is, how do we protect ourselves from majoring in minors?

2 This week’s lesson is deep—lots of math, number lines, and cryptic symbolism embedded in history. Yet, in spite of its intricacies, there is an all-important underlying message. Daniel 8 and 9 are a testament to God’s omniscience and supreme plan. It points to Jesus as the Messiah. In what ways does this prophecy make it easier to argue Jesus’ messiahship? Study the prophecies pointing to Jesus and see how they, together, make it so clear that He, and He alone, could have been the Messiah.

Application Question:

While Jesus lived on earth, He did things that let people know right away that He was special. What were some of those things? Which things can we emulate in our lives today? What are some things we can do so that people will know we are “special,” not in the sense of better but in the sense of different? And how can we do this in a positive manner so they will want to know more about us and what we believe?

Further Study: Look at this quote from a famous biography of scientist Isaac Newton, a fervent student of the book of Daniel: “Who cares whether Newton was correct in maintaining that the prophecy of the seventy weeks in the Book of Daniel referred to the interval of 490 years after Ezra’s leading the Jews from Babylon back to Jerusalem (457 BC) to the Crucifixion in AD 33/34?”—A. Rupert Hall, *Isaac Newton: Adventurer in Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 372.

“It would seem, therefore, that the rebuilding activity of the city of Jerusalem proper (Ezra 4:12) which occurred in the wake of these favors, suggests that the royal consent was implied in this decree to permit Judah to have a visible center from which the newly granted civil and judicial privileges of the state could be administered. Consequently, Artaxerxes’ ‘word’ or decree of 457 B.C. provides the best commencement date for Daniel’s 70 weeks prophecy and the longer time span of the 2300 day-years (Dan 8–9).”—*The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*, Frank B. Holbrook, editor (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), p. 74.

See also LeRoy E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, for scores of quotes from scholars, using the 457 B.C. starting date. For why we choose 457 over 458, see Siegfried H. Horn and Lynn H. Wood’s *The Chronology of Ezra 7*.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, review everything that we’ve studied so far until everyone in the class understands the material.
- 2 Have people in the class talk about how this 70-week prophecy, or any other prophecy, has made a significant impact in their lives. What can we learn from what they say on how God can use prophecy to reach us? How much of a role do you think prophecy should play in our witnessing efforts? Is it possible to put too much emphasis on prophecy?