

Faith Pulpit

The Fulfillment of Daniel's "70 Weeks" Prophecy

One unique and interesting facet of biblical literature is the existence of predictive prophecy. I am always encouraged by the cohesiveness of God's word when I read in Scripture of a prophecy coming to fruition. One such prophecy is the "coming and cutting off of the Messiah" predicted in Dan 9, referring to the arrival of the Messiah to his people and his subsequent crucifixion. The goal of this article is to briefly survey this prophecy from Dan 9, as well as observe its fulfillment in Luke 19. I hope we are mutually encouraged as we see how God's word is true in predicting these two specific events relating to Christ. This article will briefly summarize the Dan 9 prophecy, answer some frequent questions related to understanding its meaning, and end by looking at the Gospel of Luke where Christ, himself, fulfills a portion of this prophecy.

Starting with context is always helpful. At this point in the life of Daniel, the people of Israel are in captivity. Daniel received the words of this prophecy while in exile in Babylon. As verse one indicates, Daniel the prophet is reflecting on Israel's exile. He is doing some light reading in the book of Jeremiah, perhaps II Chronicles and Leviticus, and he realizes that the time of exile is drawing to a close (Jer 29:10). Daniel, realizing that this time is approaching, prays a prayer of repentance for himself and the people of Israel.

In response to this prayer, an angel of the Lord comes to Daniel and gives him the famous prophecy of the "70 weeks" (Dan 9:24-27). I encourage you to grab your copy of God's word and read through these verses along with the following explanation. The prophecy states that "70 weeks" are determined for Israel until God will "bring in everlasting righteousness, seal up vision and prophecy, and anoint the most holy place." These statements (everlasting righteousness, etc.) in verse 24 are clear allusions to the future Messianic kingdom. A couple of questions we need to answer are what is a "week", how many days are in each "week," and what determines the timeframe of when these "weeks" are to begin and end. Our overview and answers to these questions is quite limited for the sake of the article's

length; below, a few reference materials will be mentioned that would cover the topic much more thoroughly.

First, what are the “weeks” in the “70 weeks?” Remember the context: Daniel had been reflecting on how 70 years of exile was almost completed. At the end of the 70 years, Israel would go back to the promised land and Jerusalem. Then the angelic messenger says there’s another group of 70, but we need to find out, “70 of what?” Is it another 70 years? What the text says literally is that there are 70 “sevens” or 70 groups of seven. There are a few options for what the “sevens” could refer to. The best understanding is that he’s referring again to years, like the original timing of the exile. Thus, the prophecy indicates 70 groups of 7 years. Many translations use “week” in this prophecy because of the years being grouped into sevens. So, the prophecy is referring to a timeframe of 70×7 years, or 490 years.

The second question we need to answer is how many days are in each “week.” More specifically, how long are each of these years. Syncing prophetic events with modern day or historical calendars is difficult. Below I will mention Harold Hoehner’s work, and I highly recommend acquiring his material to think through this problem. Verses in Gen 7-8 and the Rev 12-13 indicate that a month is 30 days, making the year 360 days.¹ With the number of days for each “week,” we now need to determine the start of the 70 weeks to then determine the length of time, until the coming of the Messiah and his “cutting off.”

What constitutes the beginning and end of these 490 years (70 sevens)? Verse 25 determines a clear starting point, which is the decree to rebuild Jerusalem. What is important to note here is that this is the decree to rebuild the city, not just the walls or Temple. The correlating verses containing this decree can be found in Neh. 2 where the decree is given to go back and rebuild the city of Jerusalem. If we can determine when this decree was issued, starting on that day and counting forward, we will also be able to determine the days that the Messiah was to “come” and subsequently be “cut-off.”²

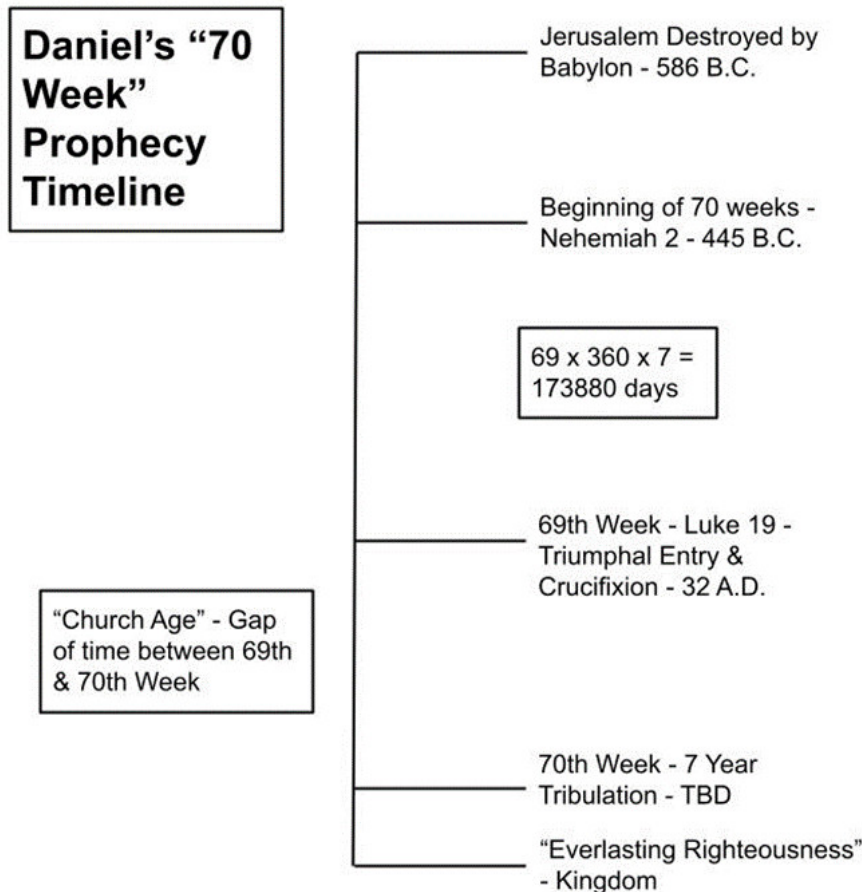
The decree in Neh. 2 to rebuild Jerusalem was issued in Artaxerxes 20th year, which equates to 445 BC. If we count 69 groups of 7 years, with each year being 360 days ($69 \times 7 \times 360$) from that date, the count lands in April of the year A.D. 32. What did the prophecy say would happen in the 69th week and at the end? The Messiah was to “come” and be “cut-off.” This is exactly what happens in April, of A.D. 32. The “coming” of the Messiah is Jesus Christ presenting himself as the Messiah in his Triumphal entry, and the “cutting-off” is his crucifixion. The prophecy predicts accurately when he would present himself as Savior and then die on the cross for the sins of the world.³ Jesus alludes to his fulfillment of this prophecy in Luke 19. Luke 19:28-44, is Luke’s recorded account of the triumphal entry. There’s actually another prophecy that is fulfilled here, the fact that he came riding in on a donkey, but that’s for Dr. Kobelia’s article.

Notice Christ's response and words as he rides in to the city. Looking at verses 41-42, Luke records for us that Christ is weeping as he rides into Jerusalem. Jesus' words in vs. 42 explain why he was weeping: the people of Israel do not recognize that their Messiah has come to them.⁴ They should have known he would be coming on that day riding on a donkey, but as Luke tells us, "they are blinded." Jesus weeps because his people do not understand that he is fulfilling this prophecy before them, and instead of arriving and setting up his kingdom, he is rejected and crucified. As Jesus spoke to Nicodemus in John 3, even the teachers of Israel did not know what the prophets predicted. This blindness was due in part to the sinful condition of the nation, but also providential in God's timeline for Israel. This blindness leads to a large gap of time between the 69th and 70th week of the prophecy. Israel's rejection of Christ leads to the time of the church. The 70th and last week of the prophecy, the Tribulation period, is still coming in future.

We are blessed to see the cohesive nature of Scripture in observing the fulfillment of certain predictions of Dan 9. Both the "coming" and "cutting off" of the Messiah are specifically determined and fulfilled in their proper timing. While there are many corollary discussions regarding this prophecy, the main point is clear: The Messiah would arrive in the 69th week and be cut off at the end of the 69th week. Starting the count from the Nehemiah 2 (445 B.C.), we arrive in April 32 A.D. where the "coming" of the Messiah is fulfilled. On that day Christ rode into Jerusalem weeping, presenting himself as Israel's Messiah. In the following days, Christ would fulfill the second prediction, being rejected by the people and condemned to crucifixion.

The accuracy of this prophecy concerning our Lord's death is astounding. But we should expect nothing less from the God of all the earth.

Timeline



This article first appeared in Frontline magazine, fall of 2023. Used with Permission.

Works Cited

1. Compare the amount of days from Genesis 7:11 – the beginning of the flood – to the end of the flood from Genesis 8:4. Genesis references this timeframe as 150 days, which divides the 5-month period into periods of 30 days. The same amount of days in the month can be acquired by verses in Revelation: Revelation 13:4-7 and Revelation 12:13-14 both describe amounts of time relating to the tribulation period. The Tribulation, discussed below, is the 70th "week" of Daniel 9's prophecy. Using Revelation's information, we also arrive at a 30-day month. This is commonly referred to as a "prophetic year;" that is, a year of 360 days.
2. Both the coming and cutting off of the Messiah were to happen in correlation with the 69th week.
3. There are many good reference materials you could use to study this out further. Let me give you a few to start: Alva J. McClain's works provide a helpful overview of this prophecy and the kingdom, especially *Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks* and *The Greatness of the Kingdom*. See also Leon Wood's *A Commentary on Daniel*. Another helpful book to study the correlation of specific days relating to Christ (the exact day of his birth, the exact day of his death, and why we use a 360 day calendar, etc.) would be *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, by Harold Hoehner.
4. Some people did recognize who Jesus was and understood his role as the Messianic King. The disciples clearly anticipated a kingdom to come (Acts 1:6). What was not clearly understood was the rejection of the Messiah and his crucifixion. The nation was blinded from seeing and receiving their Messiah, which is why the kingdom did not occur in Christ's first coming.

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