

The Future of Israel in Prophecy

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I. The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9:24-27

A. Things to be accomplished within the space of 70 “weeks” (490 years) —v.24:

1. To finish the transgression (Matt.23:29-32)
2. To make an end of sins (Heb.9:26)
3. To make reconciliation for iniquity (2 Cor.5:19)
4. To bring in everlasting righteousness (Rom.3:21, 25-26)
5. To seal up vision and prophecy (Luke 21:22)
6. To anoint the Most Holy (One?) (Acts 10:38 / Heb.9:12)

B. Theories concerning the period of the first 69 “weeks” (483 years) —v.25:

1. Begins with Cyrus (536 BC), reaches to Jesus’ baptism (Young, Woodrow, Anstey, Mauro, later Scofield)
The math: 536 BC - 483 years = 53 BC (about 80 years too early!—see reverse side)
2. Begins with Artaxerxes’ first decree (457 BC), ends with Jesus’ baptism (Isaac Newton; Halley, *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*). The math: 457 BC - 483 years = 26AD
3. Begins with Artaxerxes’ second decree (444/445 BC), ends with Jesus’ death (Julius Africanus [AD 200-245]; Ussher, Sir Robert Anderson; early Scofield, Nolen-Jones, Baxter, most dispensationalists)
The math: 445 BC - 483 years = 39AD (adjusted for lunar years and leap years = 32 AD)
Anderson’s calculations: March 14, 445 BC - 173,880 days = April 6, 32 AD (Palm Sunday)
(Another view places Palm Sunday on March 30th, 33 AD; another in the year 30 AD).

C. The seventieth “week” — vv.26-27

On theories A and B, the crucifixion of Christ comes at the middle of the seventieth “week,” fulfilling the predictions of the ending of the sacrificial system. The second half of the seventieth “week” is fulfilled in the early years of the church (or, alternatively, in the Jewish War [66-70 AD] Luke 21:22)

On theory C, Christ is crucified at the end of the 69th “week” and the seventieth “week” is postponed until after the rapture of the church.

Eusebius wrote: “Now the whole period of our Savior’s teaching and working of miracles is said to have been three and a half years, which is half a week. John the evangelist, in his Gospel makes this clear to the attentive.” (Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel*, Book 8, chap.2)

Verses 26 and 27 are parallel. Both speak of Messiah’s death (and its significance) followed by the destruction of Jerusalem, as follows:

Messiah...

- Will be cut off sometime after the 69 weeks have run their course (v.26a)
- Will confirm the covenant at the beginning of His ministry (the beginning of the 70th week), but, by dying, will bring an end to the sacrificial system in the midst of the week (v.27a)

Jerusalem...

- will be destroyed by the people of the prince who is to come (Rome) resulting in determined desolations (v.26b)
- will be reduced to determined desolation as the result of a certain abomination (v.27b)

E. Who is “the prince who is to come” (9:26)?

Theory A: Christ (He is “the Prince” in v.25)

Theory B: Titus (Roman general whose forces conquered Jerusalem)

Theory C: Demonic principality of Rome, cf. “Prince of Persia” and “Prince of Greece” (10:13, 20)

Theory D: The future Antichrist

Problems with Theory D—

1. There is no mention of antichrist previously in the prophecy—and perhaps not elsewhere in Daniel (it is common to identify the “little horn” of chs 7 & 8, and the willful king of ch.11 with such a person)

2. The “prince who is to come” is said to have been the leader of the people who destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in AD70. A future antichrist would hardly fit such a description.
3. Verses 26 and 27 seem to link this prince with the abomination of desolation, which Jesus said some of His disciples would see (Matt.24:15), and which Luke identifies with the Roman siege of Jerusalem (Lk.21:20ff)

II. The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21 and 17)

- A. Not about Israel’s future, but about the destruction of the temple (AD 70)
Matt.24:1-3; Mark 13:1-4; Luke 21:5-7
- B. Though not commonly reported, the events Jesus predicted all occurred in the period of forty years following His predictions—though sometimes predicted in apocalyptic terminology (e.g., Matt.24:29-31).
- C. The “abomination of desolation” (Matt.24:15; Mark 13:14) is identified by Luke as “Jerusalem surrounded by armies” (Luke 21:20)
- D. Jesus specifically predicted that the fulfillment would come in the generation of those living at the time (Matt.24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32)
- E. All other references to “this generation” in Matthew clearly speak of those living in Jesus’ time (i.e., 11:16; 12:41-42, 45; 23:36; cf. Matt.16:28)
- F. The Olivet Discourse makes no reference to “Israel” or “Jerusalem” or “the Jews” of any generation later than that of Christ’s contemporaries.

III. The Book of Revelation

- A. The subject matter, and much of the imagery is the same as those of the Olivet Discourse. Revelation’s use of the same apocalyptic imagery as is found in Isaiah 24, the books of Daniel and Zechariah, and the Olivet Discourse has the effect of “throwing off” the modern interpreter who is not acquainted with the genre. For example, numbers (e.g., the number seven) are used with symbolic, not statistical, significance.
- B. The destruction of the temple (AD 70) and its being given over to be trampled by the Gentiles, is a theme common to Revelation and the Olivet Discourse (Luke 21:24; Rev.11:1-2)
- C. The judgment is upon the city of Jerusalem, which is symbolically described as “Sodom,” “Egypt,” and “Babylon” (Rev.11:8; 4-5) and the judgments are symbolically described in terms reminiscent of the judgments of those cities (e.g., the plagues of Egypt, the fire and brimstone of Sodom, and the permanent fall of Babylon by the dried river Euphrates and the “kings of the East”).
- D. The “144,000.” who are sealed for preservation through the judgment (7:1-3), are also called the “firstfruits” (14:4)—a term that James uses to describe the believing Jews in his own generation (James 1:18).
- E. The “beast” is contemporary in the time of the readers, since the wise among them are expected to be able to recognize him by calculating his “number.” (13:18)
- F. The author continually mentions the nearness of the fulfillment of the prophecies (e.g., 1:1, 3, 19; 22:10)
- G. There is no passage in Revelation that makes any clear reference to the Jews beyond the time of Jerusalem’s fall.

Conclusion:

Among those parts of the Bible where many readers seek information about the future of Israel—namely, Daniel 9, the Olivet Discourse, and the Book of Revelation—there actually are not found any references to events pertaining to Israel at any period beyond AD 70. Jesus suggested that, among the Old Testament prophecies, we should not expect to find such references, since, in speaking of the historical destruction of Jerusalem, in the first century, He declared:

“These are the days of vengeance, that all things that are written may be fulfilled.” (Luke 21:22)

This statement, speaking as it does of things written previously to His time, might not encompass all prophecies made in the New Testament, which were not yet written in His day. However, the Olivet Discourse and Revelation, in particular, seem to focus on this same theme, which is the culmination of Old Testament prophecy.

Appendix: Revisiting the “Cyrus” starting point for the seventy weeks:

536 BC — *Cyrus’ Decree to rebuild the “House of God” (Ezra 1:3)*

Dispensationalist J. Sidlow Baxter writes: *“Three decrees affecting Jerusalem are mentioned in Ezra—that of Cyrus in 536 B.C., that of Darius Hvstaspis about 519 B.C., and that of Artaxerxes Longimanus about 458 B.C....None of these can be the decree foretold to Daniel, for all three relate only to the temple and worship. The one edict in history for the rebuilding of the city itself is that which was issued by Artaxerxes at the appeal of Nehemiah...”*

Dispensationalist Gabelein wrote: *“It is wrong to reckon these 70 year weeks from...the time Cyrus gave permission for the people to return and to build the temple...for they are to begin with the word to restore and build the city itself.”*

Scripture assigns to Cyrus the honor of making such a decree (Isa.44:28ff). All subsequent decrees, whether by Darius or by Artaxerxes, were relatively inconsequential in comparison to the one that brought the end to the Babylonian captivity (of which Daniel was reading when this prophecy came to him—Dan.9:2)

Josephus says Cyrus gave leave to the Jews *“to go back to their own country, and to rebuild their city Jerusalem, and the temple of God.”* In a letter to governors in Syria, Cyrus wrote: *“I have given leave to as many of the Jews that dwell in my country as please to return to their own country, and to rebuild their city, and to build the temple of God at Jerusalem on the same place where it was before. (Ant., Book 11, 1:2-3)*

Edward Young, Ralph Woodrow and Philip Mauro follow Anstey (even Scofield changed his view from the Artaxerxes date to the Cyrus date after reading Anstey [Scofield, *What Do The Prophets Say?* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Times, 1916), p.142], though the Scofield Bible notes were not corrected):

‘Ussher, Lloyd, and others have all based their chronological conclusions on the canon of Ptolemy, a list of Persian kings and the length of time they reigned. But as Mauro says: “Ptolemy does not even pretend to have had any facts as to the length of the Persian period (that is to say, from Darius and Cyrus down to Alexander the Great)”; his dates are based on “calculations or guesses made by Erathosthenes, and on certain vague floating traditions.” (*Great Prophecies of the Bible*, 95)

The bottom line is that, if Ptolemy got the length of the Persian Empire wrong (possibly as much as 80 years wrong, by overestimating the number of Persian kings), then the date of Cyrus’ conquest of Babylon would have occurred later than traditionally thought. We know that the Persian Empire fell to Alexander the Great in 332 BC. If it is assumed that the Persian Empire’s kings reigned a total of 206 years (Ptolemy’s estimate), then its beginning (Cyrus’ conquest of Babylon) would have occurred in 539 BC. (the traditional date). If, however, the gap between Cyrus and Alexander (i.e., the Persian Empire) was shorter—say by 80 years (just a speculation)—then Cyrus’ decree would have actually been later, possibly in 457 BC (and the decrees of Artaxerxes would be later still).

Ptolemy (AD90-168) lists ten Persian kings after Cyrus the Great (with combined reigns lasting 206 years)

Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD) lists eight kings after Cyrus: Cambyses (19); Darius (46); Xerxes (26); Artaxerxes (41); Darius (8); Artaxerxes (42); Ochus and Arses (3) = 205 years.

Daniel 11:2 indicates three (or four) to follow Cyrus.