

Seventy Weeks Q & A

In today's sermon you may have a few questions concerning the text. As there is only so much time to address these in the sermon, this leaflet is provided to address them in greater detail.

Question One. How can the prophecy of the seventy sevens (490 years) be fulfilled in 164 BC? There is not 490 years between 539 BC and 164 BC!

Consider the context of this text. Daniel is considering Jeremiah's 70 year prophecy. Was Jeremiah's prophecy an exact 70 years? Were those years strictly chronological or is there important theological significance to 7 or 70?

Jeremiah's 70 years are mentioned in two spots. Jeremiah 25:11 says, *"This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years."* Jeremiah 29:10 says, *"For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place."* We can say definitively from these text that Babylon's end would mark the end of these 70 years. This took place in 539 BC. If you go backward 70 years from that date, you land on 609 BC—a date of no significance for Israel. The start of those 70 years was foretold to be the destruction of Jerusalem and the surrounding nations. This happened in 587/586 BC. Which would leave us only 48 years.

Some argue that the beginning of this period should be 605 BC when some exiles were taken although the city remained untouched. But this would only give you 66 years. So was Jeremiah wrong? Certainly not! Seventy is not 48, but his prophecy was not a scientific formula. It was a theological expression. Seven is the number of completion. Seven days completes a week, following God's completion of creation in seven days. Under the old covenant, after seven Sabbath years. That is seven times seven years, the land would rest and debts would be forgiven. What number that better speaks of completion than seven!

But seven years would be insufficient to describe the length of the exile, so 70 is the obvious choice.

Remember that Jesus also used the phrase seventy times seven when we spoke of forgiveness. Peter asked him, should we forgive someone seven times. Certainly to forgive seven times would be very gracious! Jesus said no, seventy times seven. Did Jesus mean for us to keep track of how many times we forgive? We must do it up to 490 times, and then when someone asks you the 491st time, we can finally say, "No! You've used them all up!" No one I know takes this interpretation.

We must keep this in mind as we consider the seventy sevens in Daniel 9. It is unlikely to be understood as a chronologically exact 490 years. God could have said 376 years. But in this case, like Jeremiah's prophecy, the point is not date setting, but to understand that God has given a timeframe with a limit as to when he will fulfill his word and he gives it to us with theological numbers of completion. There are limits to this, of course. We wouldn't expect this to be fulfilled in a matter of a few weeks or years nor we would expect it to take thousands of years to come to completion.

Question Two. Does not this text explicitly refer to the Messiah in verse 25 and 26?

First, many English translations (i.e., NASB, NIV, NKJV) translate the word "anointed" with *Messiah* or *the Anointed One*. The capitalization is not in the original but is an interpretation of the part of the translators that this is referring to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word "anointed" is certainly used to refer to Christ Jesus in the Old Testament, but it is also used to refer to kings like David or to priests. It is even used of Cyrus, the Persian king in **Isaiah 45:1** where it says, *"This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him."* To use Messiah or capitalize Anointed One here is to make an interpretation for you that is not explicitly in the text.

Second, these translations make another decision to see the anointed one in verse 25 the same as the one in verse 26. You are left with a

weird phrase like this: *"From the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks."* What is the significance of seven weeks and sixty-two weeks? Why not just say sixty nine weeks?

The ESV translates it another way: *"From 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"*

In this case, after 7 weeks an anointed one, a prince comes. But in the case of other translations, it is after seven plus sixty-two weeks. Why the significant difference?

The NIV, NASB and others follow the Greek and Syriac translation of this verse. The ESV follows the Masoretic Text. All of these translation use the Masoretic Text as their primary text to translate the Old Testament from but some translators chose to deviate from it here.

If we stick to the literal interpretation of the Hebrew text, we have the rendering that is in the ESV translation. *"From 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."* This makes much more sense of the verse, although it does mean that the anointed one here can't be the same anointed one in verse 26.

So who is the anointed one in verse 25? It is likely speaking of Joshua or Zerubbabel. Both are called anointed ones in Zechariah 4:14 and returned with the exiles. Joshua served as high priest from roughly 515-490 BC. If you do the math, that's about 7 weeks of years or 49 years from the return of the exiles. Just as this text states!

So who is the anointed one in verse 26? That anointed one, after sixty nine weeks is cut off and has nothing.

This brings us to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. The high priest of Jerusalem was Onias III when Antiochus came to power replacing him with Jason. In 172 BC, the beginning of this seventieth week of

prophecy, when Antiochus appoints Menelaus as high priest, Onias flees and is later murdered—cut off.

When we follow the Hebrew text we have two priests, one to lead the restoration of the temple, the other murdered at the start of the terror that was the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes.

Question Three. Is not verse 24 describing a still future time of perfect peace? How can this language be referring to the end of the Antiochus crisis and the rededication of the temple in 164 BC?

Note that this verse is speaking about Israel and the restoration of Jerusalem (“your people and your holy city”) not the end of the age or the new heavens and earth. Also note that in chapter 8, it says twice that the vision there is for the time of the end (v. 17, 19). But the chapter names the Persian and Greek empires. It’s not the end of the world, as we might expect, but the end of this persecution by Antiochus and ushering a time where we see repentance, righteousness, and an end to God’s discipline that began so long ago.

Note also that the Bible uses this kind of heightened language to speak of climatic, kingdom-changing, world-changing, age-defining events. For example, Jesus himself described the destruction of the temple in 70 AD by saying *“in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be”* (Mark 13:19).

After speaking about the 70 years of exile in Babylon, Jeremiah 25:12 says, *“after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste.”* This is the language used to convey such a climactic event even though Babylon lived on being ruled by the Medes and Persians.

So also in Daniel 9:24, in the same biblical way, speaks about the time of joy and restoration after one of the most terrible times in the history of the Jewish people. All foreseen and foretold by God to bring hope, repentance, and worship among his people.