

The Gospel, 1844, and Judgment **70 Weeks**

Lesson #7 for August 12, 2006

Scriptures: Daniel 9:24-27; Ezra 4:7-16; 7:6,7,11-17

1. One of the major issues in this series of lessons is God's ability to predict the future. Isaiah says that there are three things which set the real God apart from all false gods:
 - a. the ability to create,
 - b. the ability to predict the future, and
 - c. the ability to perform supernatural miracles.

How do you feel about these evidences for God's existence? Is it fair for the real God to claim that these things separate him from all false "gods"?

2. Look at the verses in Isaiah that talk about God's ability to predict the future: Isaiah 41:21-26; 42:8,9; 43:9,12; 44:8, 25, 26; 45:1; 46:9-11; and 48:3-8.

Isaiah 41: 22,23: ²² Come here and predict what will happen, so that we will know it when it takes place.

Explain to the court the events of the past,
and tell us what they mean.

²³ Tell us what the future holds—
then we will know that you are gods! (*GNB*)

Do you "buy" this argument? Is there any way that the predictions in Daniel could have been made by a single human or a group of humans?

3. In this lesson we will focus on the 70 week, or 490 year, prophecy. We will attempt to show its relationship to the 2300 day-year prophecy and also to the 1260 year prophecy given elsewhere.
4. Read Daniel 9:24-27. Conservative Biblical scholars almost universally agree that this is a prediction of the coming Messiah. Since this prophecy clearly points to the coming of the Messiah, why is there so much confusion about when this 490 year prophecy began? No one has identified a 490-day, or 483-day, period that is of significance. Universally it is recognized that this prophecy must mean 483 or 490 years.
5. Let us review now where our discussion has come from and the points that we have made:
 - 1) The judgment in Daniel 7:9-14 and the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:13,14 refer to the same event.
 - 2) This major event occurs after the completion of the 1260 year prophecy. (3 1/2 years=42 months= 1260 years).
 - 3) In Daniel 8 a prophecy is given and most of it is explained. But the 2300 day prophecy is not explained.
 - 4) Daniel 9 is given in response to Daniel's prayer and it is an explanation of the unexplained portions of Daniel 8. Thus Daniel 8 gives the initial vision and a partial explanation while Daniel 9 gives an additional explanation including additional predictions.
6. If God wants us to see the clear parallels between Daniel 2, Daniel 7, and Daniel 8, why did he use different names for the parallel portions? Does he actually say anywhere that these prophecies are parallel? Is God really trying to make things clear here or is he intentionally trying to conceal or hide the meaning? What would have happened if God had told Daniel the whole story in detail?

7. Why do you think God chooses to give another time prophecy as a partial explanation of the previous time prophecy? Does this seem like it is just adding to the confusion?
8. Review the major events surrounding the giving of these prophecies and looking forward to the events that are the fulfillment of them. As we mentioned in the end of our previous lesson Daniel is praying earnestly that the children of Israel will return to Jerusalem to reestablish a righteous relationship with their heavenly Father. God does not disillusion Daniel by telling him the truth about what is going to happen when the children of Israel go back to Jerusalem! **But God is not looking forward to a return to Jerusalem and establishing a military or civilian presence there as a major victory for the cause of truth! He understands that when they return to Jerusalem they will very quickly become just as wicked as the people that were taken from Jerusalem before the captivity.** Such a return to Jerusalem could never represent what God is hoping to accomplish through his people. Notice the specific words that Daniel is told “seven times seventy years is the length of time God has set for freeing your people and your holy city from sin and evil...” (Daniel 9:24, *GNB*) **If we recognize that God’s goal is a deliverance from sin and evil then we must look forward to the coming of Jesus Christ or perhaps even to the end of the world! These are exactly the events which God has in mind!**
9. Notice that the word used in Daniel 9:24 is translated “cut off”, “determined”, “decreed”, etc. The basic Hebrew word means “to cut off”. Cut off from what? The only plausible explanation is that this 490 year period is cut off from the 2300 year prophecy given in Daniel 8:14. If this is not the case then we have no identifiable points to which we can attach the 2300 day-year prophecy.
10. Let us now look at some of the dates that are of importance in trying to determine the details in the fulfillment of this 70 week, or 490 year, prophecy. Jeremiah prophesied in Jeremiah 29:10 that 70 years from Babylon’s conquest of Jerusalem the children of Israel would be allowed to return. In Daniel 9, Daniel is praying for the fulfillment of this prophecy. It is fulfilled in 536/35 B.C. About 50,000 people under Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest returned to Jerusalem and began to rebuild. (See Ezra 1&2) They cleared off the Temple Mount and establish an altar for burnt offerings. But very quickly they were opposed by the surrounding peoples. And almost as quickly attempts to rebuild the Temple were stopped. **Under the able leadership and guidance of Haggai and Zechariah the rebuilding of the Temple was begun again in 520 B.C. and was completed in 516 B.C.**
11. Four decrees were issued that might possibly qualify as fulfilling Daniel 9:24.
 - A) The first decree was given by Cyrus and is recorded in Ezra 1:2-4 and issued in the first full Jewish calendar year of Cyrus in 537 B.C. It gave the Jews permission to return to their homeland. It authorized them to rebuild the Temple and allowed them to take financial assistance with them. **This was not permission to rebuild the city.**
 - B) In 520 B.C. Darius I issued a second decree for rebuilding of the Temple as found in Ezra 6:1-12. The Temple was finished and dedicated four years later in 516 B.C.
 - C) The third decree was given to Ezra himself and is recorded in Ezra 7:12-26. This decree bestowed upon Ezra authority to establish a government, install public officials, collect funds from the royal treasuries, and teach God’s people and even non-Jews about worshiping and serving the true God. Note carefully the wording of this decree as recorded in the *Good News Bible*: (Ezra 7:17,18) ¹⁷ “You are to spend this money carefully and buy bulls, rams, lambs, grain, and wine and offer them on the altar of the Temple in Jerusalem.

¹⁸ **you may use the silver and gold that is left over for what ever you and your people desire, in accordance with the will of your God.**" Unfortunately despite the efforts of Ezra the building project was stopped once again. The Western governors of the provinces of Medo-Persia wrote to the king and convinced him that if Jerusalem was rebuilt there would be a lot of trouble. So the building was stopped. (Ezra 4:13-23)

D) Finally king Artaxerxes sent Nehemiah to Jerusalem on a special mission with permission and responsibility to rebuild the city and especially to complete the wall. Much of the book of Nehemiah recounts how he did this.

12. Among these four decrees the one that most closely fits the wording of Daniel 9:24 is the decree issued to Ezra in 457 B.C. Fortunately for us, this date can be very firmly established. There are four main lines of evidence which guide us in establishing the dates for Artaxerxes' reign—**(1) the Greek historians, (2) Ptolemy's Canon, (3) the Babylonian business tablets, and (4) the Elephantine papyri from Egypt. All four lines of evidence point to the same chronological conclusion: Xerxes died in 465 B.C., and Artaxerxes came to the throne in the latter part of that same year.**
13. By reading Ezra 7:8 we see that this decree was tied to Artaxerxes' seventh year. From the ancient documents mentioned we can date Artaxerxes seventh year to that year which overlaps 458 and 457 B.C. By comparing the Babylonian calendar and the Jewish calendar we can determine that it was in 457 B.C. when Ezra traveled with his group back to Jerusalem.
14. If we remember that there was no year dated zero we can then calculate from 457 B.C. down to 34 A.D. ($457 + 33$ [plus one year to account for the missing year "0"] = 490). The final year of the prophecy which is especially emphasized then goes from A.D. 27 to A.D. 34. There is quite solid historical evidence that Jesus was baptized in A.D. 27. He was crucified in the spring of A.D. 31. In A.D. 34, after the stoning of Stephen, the Christian Church scattered from Jerusalem to all parts of the world. (Acts 8:1) Thus the Jewish people were no longer the special target of God's redemptive activity. The special time period of 490 years set apart for them had been completed.
15. Is there any question in your mind about the identity of "Messiah, the prince"? The word Messiah means the anointed one and is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek *Christos*, and our English word, Christ.
16. Let us review now the major points that we have seen: A) 70 seven's or 70 weeks were cut off for God to specifically work with his Jewish family. These 70 weeks or 490 years were cut off from the 2300 day prophecy of Daniel 8:14. There was no other prophecy from which it could be cut off. B) At the end of this period, events will lead to "an end to sin, atonement for wickedness, and an ushering in of the good news of righteousness." Is it clear in our minds what events are being referred to here? C) at the same time the anointed one will appear and be cut off. (Daniel 9:26)
17. Let us now look at the three specific time periods mentioned in the prophecy. 49 years or seven weeks were decreed for the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. This time period comes to an end in 408 B.C. Sixty-two weeks later the Messiah is anointed by his baptism in A.D. 27. One week later this special time period set apart for the Jewish people comes to an end, and because of persecution, most of the Christians from Jerusalem fled that city. In the midst of that final week—in the spring of A.D. 31—Jesus was crucified.
18. Can the events of the life of Jesus be attached to specific dates? Read Matthew 2:1,19-22; 27:1,2; Luke 2:1-7; **3:1-3**; 23:1-7. All of these historical events and characters can be dated

with a fair degree of accuracy. See SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, pp.243-247.

19. So which of the four dates of decrees for rebuilding the Temple or the city of Jerusalem most closely fits with the prophecy in Daniel 9:24? If we take the first decree of Cyrus allowing the children of Israel to return to Jerusalem in 537 B.C. Messiah the prince would be "anointed" in 55 B.C. This is obviously not the case. If we go to the decree given by Darius in 520 B.C. allowing them to rebuild the Temple, it would bring us to 37 B.C. also clearly not a possible dating for Jesus. We have already discussed the fact that the 457 B.C. date fits exactly. If instead we go to the time when Nehemiah was allowed to return to Jerusalem in 444 B.C. this would push the anointing of Jesus to the 39 or 40 A.D. and this clearly does not fit either. Thus there's only one of these four dates which fits the historical facts.
20. Why is it, then, that so many people seem to have difficulty understanding these prophecies and these dates? Have Seventh-day Adventists been too eager to talk about math and the dates and not so eager to talk about the momentous great controversy events which are being pointed out?
21. A further line of evidence pointing to the 457 B.C. date is found in Ezra 4:7-16. Notice particularly Ezra 4:12. These Persian officials were complaining about the progress that the Jews were making and they made two statements about the work: A) that the city was being rebuilt and B) that the Jews who were rebuilding it had come there because of the King's decree. Ezra here seems to recognize clearly that this decree under which he returned to Jerusalem gave him authority to rebuild the city. The Persian officials also recognize that that was what was happening. Notice that nothing in the letter from the Persian officials suggest that Artaxerxes' decree did not give them permission to rebuild Jerusalem.
22. So what have we learned in this lesson? While Daniel is looking forward to the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy in a few years, God is looking forward to a much more important fulfillment of two separate prophecies. The 490-year prophecy pointing down to the time when Jesus would come and live and serve and die and then the Jewish people would fill up their cup of iniquity by driving out the Christians from Jerusalem in A.D. 34. But God goes beyond this and states that 2300 years would pass before "the time of the end".
23. God is looking forward to the events even in our day that will finally bring an end to sin, suffering, death and the great controversy. While Daniel may have been disappointed to realize that these momentous results would not take place in his day, we should thank God for the prophecies that make it clear that they could happen in ours!

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Info@theox.org

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