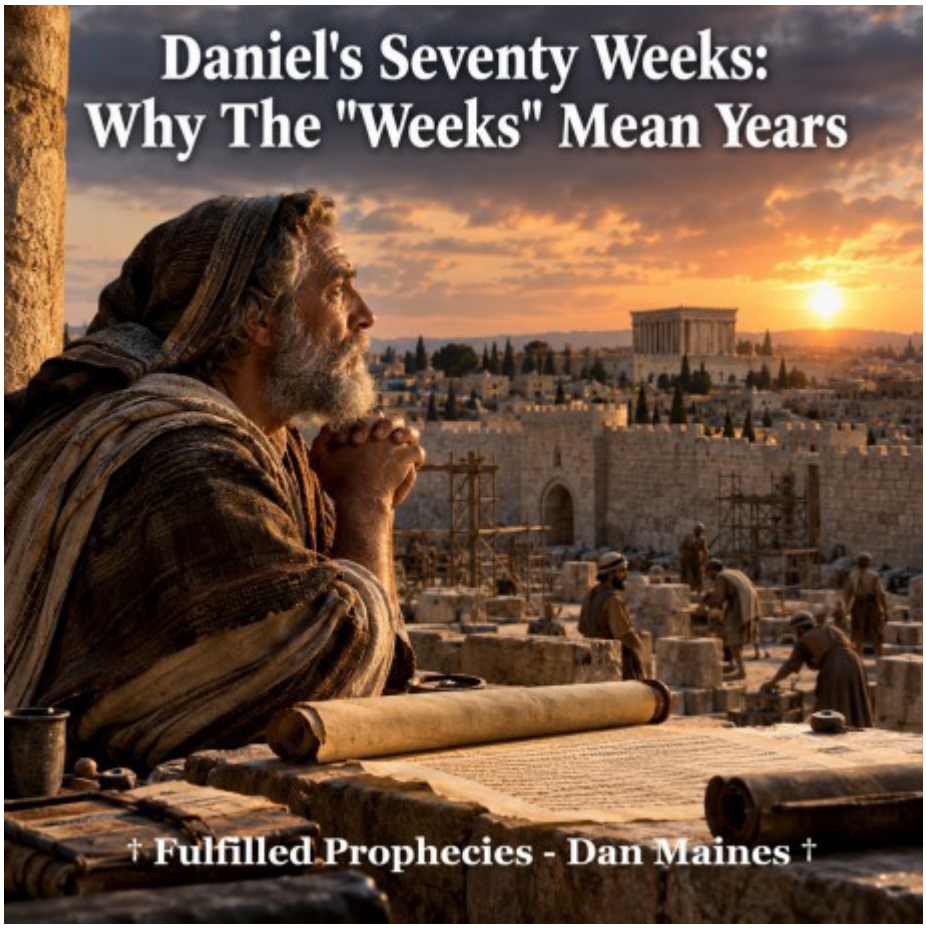
Fulfilled Prophecies

Daniel's Seventy Weeks: Why The "Weeks" Mean Years



By Dan Maines

Daniel's Seventy Weeks: Why The "Weeks" Mean Years

Introduction

† Daniel 9 is one of the clearest chronological prophecies pointing to the Messiah, but it's also one of the easiest passages to misunderstand because our English Bibles use the word "weeks."

† When we hear "week," we naturally think of seven days. The Hebrew language and the context of Daniel 9 require us to look more carefully at what Gabriel actually told Daniel.

† Daniel's prayer begins with Jeremiah's seventy years of

desolation, but Gabriel's answer expands that seventy into seventy sevens concerning Daniel's people, Jerusalem, the Messiah, atonement, and the completion of God's covenant purpose.
† The question isn't whether Daniel says seventy weeks. The question is what kind of sevens those weeks represent.

Daniel 9:2
in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.
† Daniel's entire prayer begins with years. He had been studying Jeremiah and understood that Jerusalem's desolation had been appointed for seventy years.
† This establishes the chronological setting before Gabriel ever mentions the seventy sevens. Daniel is thinking about Israel, Jerusalem, covenant judgment, restoration, and years, not an ordinary calendar week of seven days (Jeremiah 25:11-12).
† Gabriel's answer takes Daniel beyond the seventy years he had been studying and reveals a much larger prophetic timetable involving Israel and Jerusalem (Jeremiah 29:10).

Daniel 9:24
Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the wrongdoing, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for guilt, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy Place.
† The key is that the Hebrew word translated "weeks" in Daniel 9 is shavuim, meaning "sevens." It doesn't inherently mean seven days. Daniel is being told that seventy "sevens" are determined for his people and Jerusalem.
† The context begins with Daniel reading Jeremiah's prophecy about the seventy years of Jerusalem's desolation (Daniel 9:2). Daniel then receives a prophecy of seventy sevens. Seventy sevens equals 490 units, and the events described can't fit into

490 literal days.
† Daniel 9:25 makes this especially clear. From the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince are seven sevens plus sixty-two sevens, or sixty-nine sevens. If those were ordinary seven-day weeks, Messiah would arrive only about 483 days after the decree, which obviously didn't happen.
† Understood as year-sevens, sixty-nine sevens equals 483 years, which places the prophecy in the historical period leading to Christ. The final seven then completes the seventy sevens, totaling 490 years.
† There's also an Old Testament background for counting years in groups of seven. Leviticus 25:8 says, "And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years." Daniel's prayer concerns Israel's seventy-year judgment, and the answer expands the pattern into seventy sevens concerning Israel, Jerusalem, Messiah, atonement, and the completion of the covenant purpose.
† That's what you're missing, "weeks" can make us automatically think seven days, but the Hebrew is literally a unit of seven. The context determines what those sevens represent. In Daniel 9, the chronology and the events require sevens of years, not sevens of days.
† Notice the scope of the prophecy. These seventy sevens concern Daniel's people and Daniel's holy city. The prophecy has a defined covenant people, a defined city, and a defined purpose.
† Gabriel describes the finishing of transgression, dealing with sin, atonement for iniquity, everlasting righteousness, the sealing of vision and prophecy, and anointing. These are redemptive and covenant events centered on the work of Christ, not events that could reasonably occur within 490 literal days (Hebrews 9:26; Hebrews 10:12-14).

Leviticus 25:8
You are also to count off seven Sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years, so that you have the time of the

seven Sabbaths of years, that is, forty-nine years.
† Here Scripture itself demonstrates that Israel counted time in sevens of years. Seven sabbaths of years equal forty-nine years.
† This gives us an important biblical background for understanding Daniel. A prophetic seven doesn't automatically require seven literal days when the context concerns sabbatical years and covenant chronology.
† Israel already had a covenant calendar structured around groups of seven years. Daniel and his Jewish readers wouldn't have been unfamiliar with this concept (Leviticus 25:3-4).

2 Chronicles 36:20-21
He took into exile those who had escaped from the sword to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept the Sabbath until seventy years were complete.
† This passage connects the seventy-year Babylonian judgment directly with the land enjoying its Sabbaths.
† That connection is extremely important. Daniel was studying the seventy years of Jeremiah, and Chronicles explains those seventy years in relation to Israel's violated Sabbath pattern.
† The background of Daniel 9 therefore contains years, Sabbaths, covenant judgment, Jerusalem's desolation, and restoration. Gabriel's seventy sevens fit naturally within that biblical framework (Leviticus 26:34-35).

Daniel 9:25
So you are to know and understand that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, until Messiah the Prince, there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with streets and moat, even in times of distress.
† Seven sevens plus sixty-two sevens equals sixty-nine sevens. Sixty-nine multiplied by seven equals 483.
† If these were literal weeks of days, the entire period from the

command to restore Jerusalem until the Messiah would be only 483 days, approximately sixteen months.
† That interpretation collapses immediately against the historical chronology. Jerusalem's restoration and the arrival of the Messiah were separated by centuries, not sixteen months.
† The year-sevens interpretation allows Gabriel's chronology to span the historical period from Jerusalem's restoration to the time of Christ, exactly where the prophecy directs our attention.

Daniel 9:26
Then after the sixty-two weeks, the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.
† Gabriel moves from the coming of the Messiah to the Messiah being cut off, then to the destruction of the city and sanctuary.
† Jesus was crucified in the first century, and Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. The prophecy's movement is toward those first-century covenant events (Luke 19:41-44; Luke 21:20-22).
† The city in the prophecy is the same Jerusalem Daniel had been praying about. The sanctuary is the temple associated with that city. There isn't a textual reason to move Daniel's prophecy thousands of years beyond the events Gabriel described.

Daniel 9:27
And he will confirm a covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come the one who makes desolate, until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, gushes forth on the one who makes desolate.
† The final seven completes the seventy sevens. There isn't a statement in Daniel 9 inserting a gap of thousands of years between the sixty-ninth and seventieth seven.
† The prophecy remains focused on the covenant, sacrifice,

Jerusalem, desolation, and the completion of what had been determined for Daniel's people and holy city.
† Christ's sacrifice brought the old sacrificial system to its theological fulfillment. The temple sacrifices continued physically for a time, but they no longer had covenant standing after the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 9:11-12; Hebrews 10:10-14).
† The temple's destruction in AD 70 brought the old covenant sacrificial world to its visible historical end, exactly within the first-century setting toward which Daniel's prophecy moves (Matthew 24:1-2, 34).

Historical References
† Josephus records the return from Babylon and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple under Persian authority, providing important historical background for the restoration period described in Daniel's prophecy.
† Josephus also records the Roman war, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the burning of the temple in AD 70, events that correspond historically with Daniel's description of the city and sanctuary being destroyed.
† Eusebius discussed Daniel's seventy weeks as a prophecy connected with the coming and work of Christ, showing that Christians long before modern dispensationalism understood Daniel 9 as Messianic.
† Julius Africanus also treated Daniel's weeks chronologically in relation to years and the coming of Christ, demonstrating that interpreting the sevens as years isn't a modern invention.

How It Applies To Us Today
† Daniel 9 teaches us to allow Scripture and context to define prophetic language rather than automatically imposing our modern use of a word onto the text.
† When we see "weeks," we shouldn't automatically assume Gabriel meant ordinary seven-day weeks. The Hebrew speaks of sevens, and the surrounding chronology shows what kind of sevens are intended.

† The seventy sevens aren't a mysterious countdown for our future. They belong to God's covenant dealings with Daniel's people and Jerusalem and point directly toward the Messiah and the completion of that covenant purpose.
† Christ didn't miss Daniel's prophetic timetable. He came, accomplished atonement, established righteousness, and fulfilled the redemptive work toward which Daniel's prophecy pointed (Galatians 4:4-5).
† Understanding the seventy sevens as year-sevens allows the passage to remain where Gabriel placed it, within the historical movement from Jerusalem's restoration to Messiah and the judgment that ultimately came upon Jerusalem.

Q & A Appendix
Q: Why doesn't Daniel simply say 490 years?
A: Because Gabriel presents the prophecy as seventy sevens. Scripture already provides a covenant pattern of counting years in groups of seven, including seven Sabbaths of years equaling forty-nine years (Leviticus 25:8).

Q: Could the seventy sevens mean 490 literal days?
A: That doesn't fit the chronology. Daniel places sixty-nine sevens between the command concerning Jerusalem and the Messiah. 483 literal days wouldn't bring history from Jerusalem's restoration to Christ (Daniel 9:25).

Q: Why is Daniel 9:2 important for understanding the seventy sevens?
A: Because Daniel begins the chapter studying Jeremiah's seventy years. Gabriel answers a prayer already centered on years, Jerusalem, covenant judgment, and restoration (Jeremiah 25:11-12).

Q: Does the Bible actually use groups of seven for years?
A: Yes. Leviticus explicitly describes seven Sabbaths of years as seven times seven years, totaling forty-nine years (Leviticus

25:8).

Q: Is there any reason to separate the final seven from the first sixty-nine by thousands of years?
A: Daniel 9 doesn't state such a gap. The seventy sevens are presented as one determined prophetic period concerning Daniel's people and holy city (Daniel 9:24-27).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† Daniel 9:2, 24-27; Leviticus 25:8; 2 Chronicles 36:20-21
† Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews; Josephus, Wars of the Jews; Eusebius, Demonstration of the Gospel; Julius Africanus, Chronography

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