

LESSON 30

Let's quickly review each of the nine events we considered last week, and ask for each a single question: Why was that event placed where it was on the "Seventy Week" time line shown on the Lesson 28 handout (available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com)?

Event A: Event A is the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. Why was it placed at the beginning of the seventy weeks? Because of the word "from" in verse 25. This event is the starting point of the seventy weeks.

Event B: Event B is unto the Messiah the Prince. Why was it placed at the end of the first 69 weeks? Because of the word "unto" in verse 25. From Event A unto Event B will be seven weeks and 62 weeks.

Event C: Event C is the rebuilt city. Why was it placed at the end of the initial seven weeks? Because of the order in verse 25 — seven weeks and 62 weeks — and because we would expect (and, in fact, in hindsight we now know) the rebuilding to occur after the command to rebuild and before the coming of the Messiah. If Event C did not occur after the initial seven week period, then why else would verse 25 split the 69 weeks into seven weeks and 62 weeks?

Event D: Event D is the cessation of the sacrifices. Why was it placed halfway through the final week? Because of the phrase "in the midst of the week" in verse 27.

Event E: Event E is the confirmation of the covenant. Why was it placed throughout the final week? Verse 27 tells us — he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week.

Event F: Event F is the end and the consummation. Why was it placed at the end of the seventy weeks? Because it is the end and the consummation! Where else would we place “the end”?

Event G: Event G is the cutting off of the Messiah. Why did we place it halfway through the final week? Because (a) we determined that the “he” in verse 27 must be Christ because Christ confirmed the covenant, (b) if the “he” in verse 27 is Christ, then Event D, the cessation of the sacrifices, also refers to the work of Christ, and (c) Christ caused the sacrifices to cease at the cross. Thus, Event D is the cross, and we know from the text that Event D occurs in the midst of that week. Event G is also the cross (“cut off” from Isaiah 53), and thus Event G must also be at the midway point in the final week. (If instead we take Event D to be the end of sacrifices in AD 70, then the cross is at the beginning of the week, which makes it odd that Event E tells us the confirmation occurred during the entire final week — when we know that confirmation occurred throughout the ministry of Christ and the apostles.

Hebrews 2:3-4 — *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?*

Event H: Finally we have Event H, which is the destruction of the city by the prince that shall come, Titus the Roman general. That event must be placed where we placed Event F, “the end.”

Other Views about the Seventy Weeks

How else do some interpret this “seventy weeks” decree? Any approach to the prophecy can be placed in one of two buckets: it is either a chronological approach or a non-chronological approach.

The Non-Chronological Approaches

The approach we just considered is a non-chronological approach. Non-chronological approaches assume that the “seventy weeks” refers to a state of affairs (rather than a period of time) and that it symbolically describes the events in the prophecy.

The Chronological Approaches

The chronological approaches assume that the “seventy weeks” refer to a specific period of time in which the events mentioned in the decree will come to pass. There are two main chronological viewpoints.

Note: Neither viewpoint believes that the “seventy weeks” are literal since no one has ever claimed that all of the events in the decree occurred within 490 days of a decree to rebuild Jerusalem. No one (not even the most rabid premillennial literalist, of which there are many) takes everything in this vision literally!

Before looking at the two main chronological approaches, it will be helpful to review the history of the exiles’ three main returns to Palestine.

Return Number 1: 539 BC

In 539 BC Cyrus gave a decree that the Jews should return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. (Some historians think the decree was given in 538 BC. We will use the 539 BC date instead.) This decree can be found in Ezra 1 and 2 Chronicles 36.

Ezra 1:2-4 — Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place

help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 36:23 — *Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up.*

The leaders of this return were Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, and Jeshua. After their return, work on the temple was begun, sacrifices were made, and the Feast of the Tabernacles was celebrated. The Samaritans had prospered during the Jewish deportation, and they were not happy when the exiles returned. Their guerrilla tactics stopped work on the temple for 19 years until 520 BC. The temple was completed in 516 BC. This return is described in the first half of Ezra.

Return Number 2: 458 BC

Ezra, a descendant of a High Priest killed by Nebuchadnezzar, was concerned about the spiritual condition of the Palestinian Jews. There was great disparity between the rich and the poor. Most of the exiles had been men, so mixed marriages with non-Jews had become very common. Many of the children from these marriages did not even speak Hebrew. The Jewish law had been neglected. Prophets from this period speak of murder, adultery, perjury, and injustice. Artaxerxes gave Ezra approval to rebuild the city. This decree is found in Ezra 7:12-26.

Ezra 7:11-13 — *Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel. Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect*

peace, and at such a time. I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee.

Ezra led 1500 men with their families to Jerusalem. He read the law to the people, who were very moved when they realized how far they had strayed from the law of God. He commanded that the mixed marriages be dissolved, that the non-Jewish wives be sent back to their own lands, and that the walls be rebuilt. (Some have suggested that the commands to send the women out of the city and to rebuild the city walls may not have been unrelated!) The Samaritans again caused trouble. They reported the “treasonous” rebuilding of the wall to Persia, and they then proceeded to tear down the wall. This return is described in the second half of Ezra.

Return Number 3: 445 BC

Nehemiah, a cup bearer in the court of Artaxerxes, asked the king to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The king agreed, perhaps because he wanted a fort close to the Egyptian border. This is the decree found in Nehemiah 2.

Nehemiah 2:2-6 — *Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. And the king said unto me, (the queen*

also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

The Samaritans ridiculed their efforts and spread rumors that Nehemiah planned an insurrection and wanted to be king himself. The wall was rebuilt in 52 days. This return is described in the book of Nehemiah.

The Millennial Chronological Viewpoint

The starting point for this view is the decree given 445 BC by Artaxerxes to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. (That is, the starting point for this view is the third return.) Verse 25 tells us that, from this point, it will be 69 weeks (7 + 62) until the Messiah comes. Using the so-called “universal prophetic Day equals a Year” principle (more on that later...), they add 69 weeks of years (69×7 or 483 years) to this starting point. Here is where things really get complicated. If we add 483 years to 445 BC we arrive at the year AD 39, which misses Jesus’ ministry and death by a wide margin. (Keep in mind that when you add years to a BC date to obtain an AD date there is no year zero. For example, the year 1 BC + 1 year is the year AD 1.) The solution? Instead of counting 483 solar years (containing 365 days each), they count ahead 483 lunar years (containing 360 days each) to reach the year AD 32, which they claim is the year that Jesus was crucified. (Most researchers think that the crucifixion occurred a few years earlier.)

The use of lunar years is called by some “the prophetic mode of reckoning,” and such years are used in the Bible to figuratively depict some things using short periods of time, usually with a lunar *month* rather than a lunar year. All sorts of problems arise when lunar years are used to literally depict long periods of time. The only reason the premillennialists use lunar years here is that they miss their target by a mile when they use solar years.

After the 69 weeks (483 lunar years), they tell us that the prophetic clock stopped and has not ticked once in the intervening 2000 years. Instead, we have been living

in a prophetic gap period that they call the church age. The last of Daniel's seventy weeks will occur, they say, when the Rapture begins. The final three and a half years of these seven years will be the Great Tribulation when the Antichrist will reign on earth. Following those seven years, Jesus will return to reign for a thousand years on Earth.

Some initial and enormous problems with this view is that it ignores the first century time frame of this prophecy that we got from verse 24, it ignores the focus of the prophecy that we also got from verse 24, and it ignores the prayer at the beginning of Chapter 9 that caused this prophecy to be personally delivered by an angel to Daniel. It also causes the gospel to make a distinction between Jew and Gentile even though Romans 10:12 tells us "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek." It also ignores the repeated warnings in the New Testament that the end will **not** be preceded by any signs but instead will come as thief in the night.

There are a host of other problems with the millennial viewpoint, many of which do not have a direct bearing on the passage we are considering. Without going into all of these, we will pause for a few moments and consider the general premillennial approach to interpreting scripture.

Problems with Premillennialism

First, does it make any difference what we believe about premillennialism? Is it all just a matter of opinion? Should we make an issue out of it? We looked at one opinion on that issue back in Lesson 9. Recall what Professor Carroll Osburn of Abilene Christian University had to say on pages 90 and 91 of his book *The Peaceable Kingdom*:

There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who differ on whether more than one cup in communion is acceptable, whether the communion bread is to be pinched or snapped, whether one can eat in the church building, whether funds can be used from the church treasury to support orphan homes; whether the Lord's Sup-

per must be taken every Sunday, or whether instrumental music is used in worship. There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who believe that Christ is the Son of God, but who differ on ... premillennialism, ... congregational organization, or ... whether baptism is “for” or “because of” the remission of sins.

Yes, if you sent your child to ACU with current tuition at \$29,450 a year, that is the sort of Bible teaching they would receive, assuming they received any Bible teaching at all. According to Professor Osburn, premillennialism (and baptism and instrumental music, for that matter) is on par with the raging controversy over whether communion bread should be pinched or snapped. That is, premillennialism, baptism, and instrumental music are just side issues that don't really matter so long as we all just believe that Christ is the Son of God. But can I honestly say that I believe that Jesus is the Son of God if I ignore what he has to say about baptism and acceptable worship? If I ignore what he has to say about the end of the world? If I ignore what he has to say about the authority of the scriptures?

But let's get back to the one so-called side issue that is of particular interest to us. Is premillennialism a side issue that doesn't really make that much difference? To answer that question, let's turn to John Walvoord, who was perhaps the leading proponent of premillennialism. Here is what he had to say about its importance:

If premillennialism is only a dispute about what will happen in a future age which is quite removed from present issues, that is one thing. If, however, premillennialism is a system of interpretation which involves the meaning and significance of the entire Bible ... that is something else. ... It is not too much to say that millennialism is a determining factor in Biblical interpretation of comparable importance to the doctrines of verbal inspiration, the deity of Christ, substitutionary atonement, and bodily resurrection.

Thus, according to Walvoord, premillennialism is a “determining factor in Biblical interpretation.” And if you read their commentaries, you soon find out that this is

no exaggeration. They manage to work those thousand years into practically everything even though the “1000 year” figure they rely on occurs only in Revelation 20.

With all due respect to Professor Osburn (which isn't much), it does make a difference what we believe about premillennialism. It is not a side issue, it is a main issue. Why? Because the premillennialist doctrine has consequences that run counter to the very heart of the gospel. Premillennialists teach that one day the Levitical priesthood and the sacrificial system will be restored. In this way, they belittle the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice and his eternal priesthood. They teach that Jesus is not presently ruling over Israel. Thus, they belittle his claim to have all authority in heaven and earth. They belittle his title of King of kings and Lord of lords. They teach that Jesus' mission on earth was a failure, and that the church (his body) was a result of that failure. Thus, they belittle the plan of God, and they belittle the importance of his church. They teach that our Lord and Savior was a failure who caused God to come up with a Plan B at the last minute.

Can I say that Jesus is the Son of God and yet claim that he was a failure? That his church was a mistake? That he does not have all authority? That his sacrifice was not sufficient? Professor Osburn apparently thinks that I can.

I cannot claim on one hand that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords (as Scripture affirms in 1 Timothy 6:15) and claim on the other hand that premillennialism is true. The two claims are logically inconsistent. In fact, premillennialists deny that Jesus is today reigning as king — so they likewise seem to admit the inconsistency.

It makes a great deal of difference what we believe about this important issue. It strikes at the very core of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Premillennialism is false, and we must continue to proclaim that.

As I mentioned in Lesson 9, we owe a great debt to Foy E. Wallace for keeping it out of the Lord's church. Foy Wallace (then the editor of the *Gospel Advocate*) debated Charles Neal (minister of the Main Street Church of Christ in Winchester, Kentucky) in 1933 about the thousand year reign. Brother Wallace was largely respon-

sible for keeping that false doctrine from infiltrating the church. (What would the situation be like today if he had just ignored the problem back then? I hate to think. That sort of problem rarely goes away by itself. Someone must have the courage to stand up and refute it.)

Reasons Why the Millennial Chronological Viewpoint is Wrong

Reason #1: There is no proof that the so-called “Day Equals a Year” principle is in operation here. Although this principle is sometimes claimed to be some sort of “Universal Prophetic Principle,” it is in fact used with certainty only twice in the Bible.

Numbers 14:34 — *After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, **each day for a year**, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.*

Ezekiel 4:6 — *And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee **each day for a year**.*

How do we know the principle is in operation in these two passages? Because God tells us explicitly each time. Does that mean God couldn't use it elsewhere without telling us? No, but it does cast doubt on the idea that he would. Why tell us there but not here?

But could it be a *universal* principle? No. There are many cases where it is clearly not in use. The creation account leaps to mind. Was the creation week a seven year period? I know of no one who believes that it was.

We know with certainty it is not a universal principle — not even in prophecies. Jonah was in the belly of that fish for three days, and we learn in Matthew 12:39-40 that those three days were a prophetic sign of the time between the cruci-

fixion and the resurrection. Did that take three *years*? It would seem it must have if there is some sort of a *universal* principle in operation.

There is no universal principle of Biblical interpretation that requires us to view days as years. To take that view here requires an assumption because God does not tell us here (as he does elsewhere) that the principle is in effect.

Reason #2: Beginning with the 445 BC decree from Nehemiah is just an assumption, and not a very good one. The prophecy clearly has a starting point, but what is it? Verse 25 tells us that the starting point was the time when the word went out to restore and build Jerusalem. When was that? If it were not for the efforts to make a chronology fit this prophecy, then there would never have been any question as to the starting point: it is the decree of Cyrus in 539 BC. Let's consider the facts.

God had prophesied that Cyrus would rebuild the city. Some deny that he did, but listen to Isaiah.

Isaiah 44:28 — *That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.*

Isaiah 45:13 — *I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the Lord of hosts.*

Cyrus gave a decree relating to Jerusalem in 539 BC. Daniel received this vision around 539 BC. Put yourself in Daniel's place. Which decree would you have thought God was speaking about? The only decree you knew about! The decree that Cyrus had just given must have been the one that God was referring to. And if the starting point was a decree that would not occur until after the days of Esther, then why was Gabriel in such a hurry to deliver it to Daniel?

The context virtually demands that we take the starting point of this prophecy to be the decree of Cyrus in 539 BC. If you take that decree as your starting point, then you will **never** reach the cross in 69 weeks of years (483 years) — lunar or solar.

Reason #3: The use of lunar years to reach their target date is baseless. Going back to the lunar calendar to make the numbers work out is (pardon the pun) *lunacy*. No country (ancient or otherwise) has ever used lunar years to count out long periods of time without including some method of intercalation (the insertion of days into the calendar) to reconcile the lunar and solar years. At the time of Daniel, the Assyrians, Babylonians, Sumerians, Persians, and Egyptians all had methods in place for reconciling lunar and solar calendars. None of those countries would have measured a long period of time with lunar years — and neither did God. Yes, lunar months (not years) are sometimes used to give us nice round numbers for short prophetic symbols, but they are not used to pinpoint precise events hundreds of years into the future.

Reason #4: They miss the date of the cross — perhaps by as much as several years. This inaccuracy is particularly troubling based upon their own comments regarding the accuracy of what they call the *Divine Chronology*. Here is what one leading proponent had to say:

And accuracy as absolute as the nature of the case permits is no more than men are here entitled to demand. There can be no loose reckoning in a Divine chronology; and if God had designed to mark on human calendars the fulfillment of His purposes as foretold in prophecy, the strictest scrutiny shall fail to detect miscalculation or mistake.

I agree that the strictest scrutiny will not detect an error on God's part. However, even a casual scrutiny is enough to detect numerous errors on the premillennialists' part.

The Non-Millennial Chronological Viewpoint

This view, which is popular in the church, begins with the decree of 458 BC when Artaxerxes gave Ezra approval to rebuild the city. (That is, it begins with the second decree — the decree found in Ezra 7.) Again, verse 25 tells us that 69 weeks will elapse before the Messiah comes. Applying the “Day Equals a Year” principle to the 69 weeks gives us 483 years, as before. Taking the starting point of 458 BC and adding 483 (solar, this time) years, we arrive at the year AD 26, which is about the year that Jesus was baptized (which we agreed was most likely the event that marked the end of the 69 weeks). Verse 27 tells us that in the middle of the seventieth week, the sacrifices will cease. This, they say, occurred when Jesus died on the cross and ushered in the new Christian age (which also agrees with our conclusions). Again, this seems to fit chronologically since Jesus’ earthly ministry lasted about three and a half years.

Most in the church rightly reject the millennial approach, but this non-millennial approach is very popular. Let’s consider a few arguments against the non-millennial chronological viewpoint.

Reasons Against the Non-Millennial Chronological Viewpoint

Reason #1: Again, there is no proof that the “Day Equals a Year” principle is in operation here. There are only two places in Scripture where we know it is used, and the reason we know it is because each time God explicitly told us it was being used.

Reason #2: Verse 25 requires that seven weeks (49 years) elapse from the decree in 458 BC until the city is rebuilt. That is, verse 25 under this interpretation would have the city rebuilt in 409 BC. But, Nehemiah suggests that the city was rebuilt in 444 BC during the reign of Artaxerxes.

Reason #3: There is no particular reason to begin with the decree in 458 BC from Ezra 7, except that it seems to work. As we mentioned earlier, there is much more reason to believe that the prophecy begins with the decree of Cyrus in 539 BC.

Reason #4: Verse 26 tells us that the seventy weeks includes the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under Titus in AD 70. There is no way to make this AD 70 event fit with a 490 year chronology beginning in 458 BC. If the first half of that final week is a literal three and a half years, then why not the second half?

In short, I think the non-millennial chronological view is wrong, but just because it doesn't make sense — not because it violates the Scriptures (which makes the non-millennial chronological view very much *unlike* the millennial chronological view in that regard).

A Final Potential Objection: The seventy years in Jeremiah that we started with in Daniel 9 was a literal seventy years. Why then should we take the “seventy sevens” figuratively? First, as we have mentioned, NO ONE takes it entirely literally since seventy weeks does not give us enough time to get to the Messiah from the time of Daniel. Second, I think the seventy years in Jeremiah is both literal and figurative. God chose the number seventy for a reason. Third, our rule with apocalyptic language is that we will take numbers figuratively unless forced to do otherwise. Certainly we are not forced to do otherwise here. But even if we tried to take the 490 years literally, there is no way to make a chronological system of 490 years fit the events in this vision, which includes the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and begins at the latest in 445 BC (and most likely begins in 539 BC!). As shown on the handout (available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com), the first return gives us 608 years to AD 70, and the third return gives us 514 years — and the prophecy almost certainly was about the first return. Thus, we are in effect FORCED to view the value of seventy as symbolic unless we had rather use a faulty chronology.

One last point about Chapter 9: Jerusalem was destroyed in **AD 70** — is that number seventy somehow tied in with all of the other seventies we have seen here? The answer is, almost certainly, no. The AD system of numbering did not appear

until 500 years after AD 1. But we can say, at least, that the city of Jerusalem fell *about* seventy years after the birth of Christ, which is definitely interesting.