

## SPIRITUAL FAILURE, POSTPONEMENT, AND DANIEL 9

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Until recently, most interpretations of Dan 9:24-27 have treated the text in one of two ways. Those who take a more critical approach view it as a second century BC pseudepigraphic history chronicling the events related to the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167-164 BC.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, those from a more conservative camp find here a distinctly Christian element. For them it is a sixth century BC prophecy, identifying more or less precisely<sup>2</sup> the date of some event in the life of our Lord during the Roman era, perhaps with an extended eschatological dimension.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to both approaches, this study understands the passage as a sixth century BC prophecy, but focusing on the postponement of the expected restoration caused by the poor spiritual condition of the remnant at the close of the exile. In the brief announcement by Gabriel, the captivity of Jerusalem is extended from the seventy *years* originally intended (Jer 25:1-13; 29:1-14), to seventy *weeks* of years, that is, 490 years.<sup>4</sup> This results in a prophetic era beginning with the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and continuing through the era when the Medes, Persians, and Greeks respectively exercised varying degrees of control over the ancient Near East.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. Lacocque, *Book of Daniel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1976) 187-99; L. F. Hartman, *Daniel* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1978) 238-54.

<sup>2</sup>Opinions range from the figurative and general conclusions of H. C. Leupold (*Exposition of Daniel* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1949, 1969] 403-40) to the precise calculations of H. W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977) 115-39.

<sup>3</sup>For a summary of the most common approaches see P. D. Feinberg, "An Exegetical and Theological Study of Daniel 9:24-27," *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg* (ed. J. S. Feinberg and P. D. Feinberg; Chicago: Moody, 1981) 189-220; G. F. Hasel, "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9:24-27," *Ministry Insert* 5D-21D, *Ministry* 49 (1976).

<sup>4</sup>This study follows the consensus of critical and conservative scholarship in interpreting *שָׁבָע* as "weeks of years," as is the case in Gen 29:27-28.

<sup>5</sup>R. J. M. Gurney ("Approaching Daniel: Three Studies," *Themelios* 2/2 [1977] 39-52; *God in Control: An Exposition of the Prophecies of Daniel* [Worthing: Henry E. Walter, 1980]; "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9:24-27," *EoQ* 53 [1981] 29-36) made one of the earliest suggestions toward this alternative. His work is followed by an

However, its fulfillment comes neither during the Greek nor Roman occupations, but rather at the zenith of Israel's independence under the Hasmonean kings Aristobulus I (104-103 BC) and his half-brother Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BC).

Several factors in the immediate context point to this conclusion: (1) the specifically identified starting point for the seventy weeks (9:2) as the going forth of the word of Jeremiah in 605 BC; (2) the separation in the Hebrew text at 9:25 of the seven weeks which begin the prophetic era, from the sixty-two which follow them; (3) the literal fulfillment of the three distinct segments of the seventy weeks (9:24-27) in the reigns of Aristobulus I and Alexander Jannaeus; (4) the prayer of Daniel (9:3-19) as it relates to the conditionality and postponement of the restoration from the seventy years of captivity; and (5) the broader context of the Book of Daniel with its carefully focused theme on the judgment of proud rulers.

### I. THE CONTEXT OF JEREMIAH'S "WORD" IN DANIEL 9:2

The literary unit of Dan 9:24-27 is part of a longer response of Gabriel to the prophet (9:20-27). The angelic messenger comes in answer to Daniel's prayer (9:3-19), which is itself a response to his reading "letters" containing the "word [דְּבַר] . . . בְּסִפְרִים] of YHWH to Jeremiah regarding the fulfillment of Jerusalem's smiting, *namely seventy years*" (9:1-2). Because this is the context in which Daniel is thinking when the word of Gabriel goes forth to him, any interpretation of the text must begin here.

There are two passages in Jeremiah to which Daniel may be referring. The first, Jer 25:1-13, provides the earlier occasion for the "word (דְּבַר) to Jeremiah," which comes during the first year of Nebuchadnezzar (605 BC). It predicts that the "words" of his "letter" (25:13) will be fulfilled in the destruction of Babylon after seventy years are completed. The second possible reference is Jer 29:1-14. Here one finds the historical context for the sending out of the word in a "letter" (שְׁלַח) . . . דְּבַר יְהוָה . . . הַסֵּפֶר) to the captives in Babylon around 594 BC, shortly after Jeconiah's deportation in 597 BC.<sup>6</sup> In short, it is God's promise to "restore the captivity" (אֲדֹנָיִם שְׁבִיחָם) (וְשָׁבָה, v. 14) of a repentant remnant. In Jer 30:18, the same phrase is linked directly with the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple, a concept which surely was in the minds of his listeners on the earlier occasions.

One cannot determine with certainty whether the letter being read by Daniel was actually one of those sent from Jerusalem in 594 BC. Nevertheless, it is important to notice the function of the repetition of the standard prophetic formula (לְמַעַן דְּבַר) (e.g., Isa 45:23) in this passage. Not only is Daniel's prayer interrupted by an an-

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important contribution from this perspective by J. H. Walton titled "The Four Kingdoms of Daniel," *JETS* 29 (1986) 25-36.

<sup>6</sup>J. Bright, *Jeremiah* (AB: Garden City: Doubleday, 1974) 210-11.

gelic "word" which "goes forth" (דָּבַר יָצָא) at the same time Daniel responds to his reading of the "word" of Jeremiah (9:22-23), but more importantly, the starting point of the "seventy weeks" is identified similarly, as "the going forth of a word (דָּבַר יָצָא) to restore and to build Jerusalem" (9:25).

Inasmuch as the term used in each of these references is the common דָּבַר ("word") and not צִוְיָה ("command"), as many English versions imply,<sup>7</sup> there is no need to read into the passage the meaning of a "royal decree" issued by a Persian ruler.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, the context of Dan 9 strongly supports the common usage of דָּבַר, thus identifying the *terminus a quo* of the prophetic era as the initial "going forth" of that "word" through Jeremiah in 605 BC.

## II. MASORETIC POINTING OF DANIEL 9:25

As it stands, the Hebrew text does not allow for a primary fulfillment of the prophecy during the earthly ministry of our Lord in the Roman era. Instead, the passage translates literally as follows:

and you *are to* know and understand  
from the going forth of a word to restore and to build Jerusalem  
until an anointed one *who is a ruler*, [zaqeph qaton]  
there *shall* be seven weeks; [*athnach*]

... and for sixty-two weeks [*rebia*]  
it shall be restored and built street and moat, [zaqeph qaton]  
even in distressful times.<sup>9</sup>

The careful reader will observe that the *'athnach*, the strongest disjunctive Masoretic accent mark between verse dividers, separates the "seven weeks" from the "sixty-two weeks," rather than joining them into a corporate entity equaling "sixty-nine," again, as many English translations imply.<sup>10</sup> Thus the larger period of "seventy weeks" is divided into three smaller ones, consisting of "seven weeks" (forty-nine yrs.), "sixty-two weeks" (434 yrs.), and "one week" (seven yrs.). The most significant break comes between the "seven" and the "sixty-two." The first prophetic period measures forty-nine years which extend "from the going forth of a word to restore and build Jerusalem until an anointed ruler." In contrast,

<sup>7</sup>This rendering is sustained by the *KJV*, *NKJV*, *NASV*, and *NIV*, in contrast to the *RSV* which translates "word."

<sup>8</sup>See Feinberg, "Exegetical" 191-95; G. L. Archer, "Daniel," *EBC* 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985) 114. Although it is possible to render דָּבַר by "command/ decree," it is highly unusual and therefore should not be done unless warranted by the context.

<sup>9</sup>In order to give the reader a more direct sense of the Hebrew text, a wooden-literal translation is provided, avoiding lower/upper case distinctions. Disjunctive accents weaker than the *rebia* are represented only by a carriage return.

<sup>10</sup>Again, the *RSV* renders the text more accurately than do the *KJV*, *NKJV*, *NASV*, and *NIV*.

the second period is associated with the 434 years of rebuilding "street and moat, even in distressful times." If these numbers are read separately, as the Masoretic punctuation indicates, it is impossible for the phrase "an anointed ruler" to be applied to "The Messiah the Prince," regardless of where the *terminus a quo* is located. In other words, in order to obtain a Christological interpretation of this passage, the received text must be emended.

Regarding this phenomenon, it is instructive to notice that the earliest editions of the *King James Version* (1611-1785) follow the Masoretic punctuation and place a semi-colon after the "seven weeks," thus separating the numerals. However, in 1785 an annotated edition appeared which retained the Masoretic punctuation in its text, but added an explanatory note suggesting that "a colon should be placed at the end of this sentence," that is, after the "seven weeks *and* sixty-two weeks," which in the opinion of the editor was, "wrong placed in the middle of it in our English Bibles."<sup>11</sup> No objective basis is given for this emendation apart from the telling assertion that the prophecy is then "justly allowed to be one of the noblest . . . in the Old Testament, as it is one of the strongest proofs against the Jews, in favour of Christianity . . . since it determines the very time Christ was to come into the world, enter into his ministry, and be cut off for the sins of the people."<sup>12</sup> Thirteen years later in 1798 the suggested emendation began to appear in the *text* of the *KJV*,<sup>13</sup> although no longer with an explanatory note.

Admittedly, this is not an emendation of the consonantal text, but only of the Masoretic pointing, which all agree is neither inspired nor infallible. Nevertheless, the careful work of these Jewish scholars from the sixth to ninth centuries AD is usually recognized as a starting point for examining a passage unless there is good reason for an emendation. Even then, such changes are normally based on objective evidence rather than theological bias. This well-accepted practice is supported by the so-called "scholar's dictum," which maintains that "the more the difficulties in understanding an important passage . . . accumulate, the less we are permitted to make an attempt at overcoming them by mere alteration of the text. In such cases the text has been transmitted with especial care."<sup>14</sup>

Surprisingly, such "alteration of this text" is done most often by those who otherwise demonstrate a high regard for the Masoretic pointing and punctuation. For example, in their respective commentaries on the Book of Daniel, such conservative writers as Bald-

<sup>11</sup>Ostervald, *et al.*, *The Holy Bible. . .with Annotations* (London: Harrison, 1785) *ad loc.*

<sup>12</sup>Ostervald, *Holy Bible*, *ad loc* Dan 9:24.

<sup>13</sup>*The Holy Bible* (Massachusetts: Thomas, 1798) *ad loc.*

<sup>14</sup>J. A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1927) 377.

win,<sup>15</sup> Feinberg,<sup>16</sup> Walvoord,<sup>17</sup> Wood,<sup>18</sup> and Archer<sup>19</sup> all gloss over this difficulty with scarcely a comment. Similarly, Young asserts without support that the pointing "may be . . . in error" (as he thinks it is in this case). He continues, "if the Masoretic pointing be retained, it may be regarded merely as serving to indicate, not the principal division of the sentence, but simply that the two phrases are not to be connected."<sup>20</sup> However, he then goes on to *connect* the two phrases, again giving no explanation. Likewise, Hoehner attempts to overcome the difficulty by arguing on the subjective basis that an *'athnach* sometimes occurs "where normally one would not expect it." Further, he expresses the opinion that in Dan 9:25 it is "foreign to the context and makes no sense."<sup>21</sup>

In short, no well-supported objective argument has been presented in favor of emending the MT so as to combine the numerals.<sup>22</sup> Instead, the only basis seems to remain a theological bias not unlike that which brought about the change in the *KJV* over two hundred years ago. In contrast to this unsatisfactory methodology, the present study maintains *on the basis of the context* that the received reading is not only at home, but indeed makes *better* sense than the suggested change.

### III. IDENTIFICATION OF ARISTOBULUS I AND ALEXANDER JANNAEUS

Rather than focusing on the more commonly identified Greek oppressor Antiochus Epiphanes early in the second century BC, or on the earthly ministry of our Lord early in the first century AD, a plain reading<sup>23</sup> of Dan 9:24-27 brings one to the reign of the Hasmonean kings who officially established post-exilic Israel as a kingdom and expanded her borders to their greatest extent since the

<sup>15</sup>J. G. Baldwin (*Daniel* [TOTC; Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1978] 170) only points out that the punctuation is not part of the original text.

<sup>16</sup>C. L. Feinberg, *Daniel, the Man and His Visions* (Chappaqua: Christian Herald, 1981) 115-35.

<sup>17</sup>J. F. Walvoord (*Daniel, the Key to Prophetic Revelation* [Chicago: Moody, 1971] 229) comes closest to mentioning it when he charges Montgomery with "straining to prove a non-Christological interpretation."

<sup>18</sup>L. Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973).

<sup>19</sup>Archer, "Daniel," 111-21.

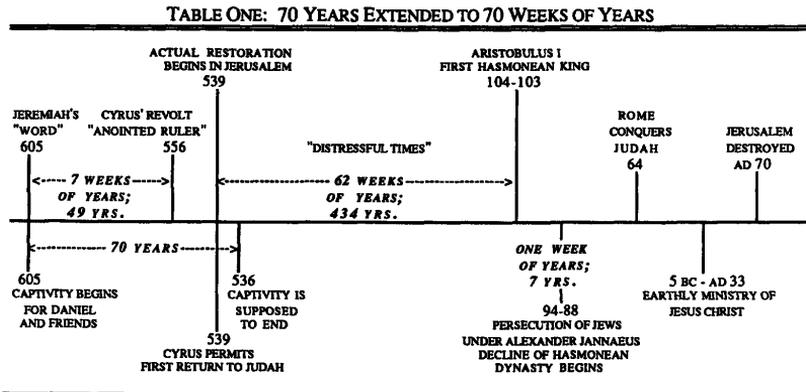
<sup>20</sup>E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949) 205.

<sup>21</sup>Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 130-31.

<sup>22</sup>R. T. Beckwith comes close, but does not deal with the Masoretic pointing at 9:25 as much as he does the scope of the "seventy sevens" ("Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah's Coming in Essene, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Zealot and Early Christian Computation," *RevQ* 10 [1981] 521). Beyond this, his conclusions are answered well by T. E. McComiskey ("The Seventy 'Weeks' of Daniel against the Background of Ancient Near Eastern Literature," *WTJ* 47 [1985] 18-25), whose study treats thoroughly the Hebrew syntax as well as the early versions.

<sup>23</sup>That is, using the more common "solar years," as opposed to the creative idea of "prophetic years" suggested in R. Anderson's *The Coming Prince* (London: Hodder &

days of David and Solomon.<sup>24</sup> Table One (below) demonstrates the relationships between the three distinct periods of the prophecy and the original seventy years of captivity from which they were extended.



The Babylonian exile, the most devastating event in Israel's history prior to the Roman era, is pictured often in the Book of Daniel. For the prophet and his associates it begins with their deportation under Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC, and if calculated by a literal seventy years, extends into the third year of Cyrus' occupation of the city of Babylon (536 BC). More or less precise references to the termini for this period are seen in the opening and closing remarks to the introductory chapter of the book (1:1, 21), in the dating of the parallel accounts in chaps. 2 and 7, 3 and 6, and 4 and 5, as well as in the dating of the Hebrew sections in chaps. 1 and 8-12.

Although each of these sections focuses the reader's attention on the seventy years of exile, it is important to note that those years (i.e., 605-536 BC) are not fulfilled exactly, in that the return is permitted by Cyrus in his first year (539 BC) and actually occurs shortly thereafter.<sup>25</sup> In other words, the seventy years are generally symbolic of the period of the captivity, but cannot be calculated precisely with regard to their fulfillment.

Stoughton, 1895) 67-75, which is followed by Hoehner (*Chronological Aspects*, 135-38).

<sup>24</sup>F. F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 172-77; cp. the geographical boundaries described by Y. Aharoni and M. Avi-Yonah in *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* (New York: Macmillan, 1976) 213.

<sup>25</sup>The exact timing of the return(s) in Ezra 1-3 is difficult to determine with certainty. See the discussion by R. Pierce, *The Unresponsive Remnant: History, Structure and Theme in Haggai* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1984) 36-74.

It is helpful to keep this fact in mind when considering the extended gentile oppression of the seventy weeks of years.<sup>26</sup> If this period is calculated as a single unit from the going forth of the word of Jeremiah in 605 BC, then its fulfillment comes four hundred ninety years later (115 BC), in the reign of John Hyrcanus, who establishes the independence of the Judean state during the generation that followed the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes.<sup>27</sup> Although this normal, literal method of reckoning the date appears at first to make good sense, and in fact agrees in general with the focus suggested in this study, there is, according to the text, a different and somewhat more precise manner in which the era is to be figured. Rather than being linked in a linear fashion, the three groups of weeks of years are presented respectively as representative of three distinct periods in the distressful experience of Jerusalem's captivity.

As mentioned briefly above, the first period of seven weeks quite literally represents the forty-nine years which elapsed from the going forth of the word of Jeremiah to restore and build Jerusalem (605 BC) to the appearance of Cyrus the Persian in 556 BC, the year before his revolt against his Median overlord, Astyages.<sup>28</sup> According to the prophecy of Isaiah (44:24-45:7) this ruler was YHWH's "anointed one" (יָמִיךָ) to effect the return of the repentant remnant to Judah, along with the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and its temple. The connection between the person and the prediction is simply too clear to be missed.

The fulfillment of the second group of weeks of years is found to be just as literal as that of the first, if one follows the words of the text carefully. The period of sixty-two weeks is not connected directly to the one preceding it, but rather is representative of the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem, "street and moat, even in distressful times." In fact, this activity did not begin with the initial appearance of Cyrus on the world scene in 556 BC, but rather commenced with the first return of the people which came about shortly after he conquered Babylon in 539 BC. Counting from this point, one comes to the accession of the Maccabean king Aristobulus I to the throne of Judah in 104 BC. In him the prophet foresees yet another "anointed one" who appears shortly after the close of the "sixty-two weeks" (9:26-27). His reign marks the official reestablishment of Judah as a kingdom, a task begun by the Maccabees in the revolt of 167-166 BC. The "distressful times" for all Israel from Dan to Beersheva had finally come to an end.

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<sup>26</sup>This is especially applicable when evaluating the necessity of such meticulous measurements as those employed by Hoehner (*Chronological Aspects*, 133-40) and Anderson (*Coming Prince*, 67-75).

<sup>27</sup>Bruce, *Israel*, 170.

<sup>28</sup>See the "Synchronistic Table" appended to the article by G. Buchanan, "The Foundation and Extension of the Persian Empire," *CAH* 3 (Cambridge: University, 1964) II-III.

The last week of years focuses on a "coming prince" who succeeds in "confirming a covenant with the great ones (or, many) for one week," and who in the midst of that period causes the "cessation of sacrifice" along with a time of "detested desolations" (9:26b). In the end, Jerusalem and the temple are "destroyed" by the people of this "coming ruler."

This last week finds a literal fulfillment in the conquests of Alexander Jannaeus, the half-brother of Aristobulus, who enlarged the kingdom to its greatest extent since the days of Solomon, on both sides of the Jordan, but did so "at a ruinous cost to all that was worth while in the spiritual heritage of his people."<sup>29</sup> The best and worst of times came for the Hasmoneans in this "prince" who was high priest as well as king. Although he greatly expanded Judah's borders during the first ten years of his reign, he was more oppressive than many of the Hellenistic overlords against whom his ancestors had revolted. The cruelest stroke is felt when he "makes a covenant with" Greek mercenaries to fight a rebellion of his own people which lasted from 94-88 BC ("seven years"; i.e., the last week of the prophecy),<sup>30</sup> resulting not only in the "cessation of sacrifices," but also in the slaughter of an estimated fifty thousand Jews in their own land and at the command of their own king. The ideals upon which the nation had been reborn were lost, marking a major turning point in its short history (164-64 BC). After the death of the king a brief time of rest follows under the Queen-mother, Salome Alexandria, but then erupts into civil war between Alexander's two sons, who witness the loss of their independence to Rome.<sup>31</sup>

In summary, the period of the seventy weeks of years finds a reasonable and literal fulfillment in the "anointed rulers" Cyrus (seven weeks), Aristobulus I (sixty-two weeks), and Alexander Jannaeus (the final week). Thus, once again there is no need to emend the text or to read into the context a reference either to Antiochus Epiphanes or to the ministry of our Lord.

#### IV. CONDITIONALITY AND POSTPONEMENT OF RESTORATION

At first reading, two elements in the text of Dan 9:24-27 appear to be obstacles to the proposed fulfillment of the last week in the person and era of Alexander Jannaeus. These are the completion of

<sup>29</sup>Bruce, *Israel*, 174.

<sup>30</sup>The reference by Jesus in Matt. 24:15 to the "abomination of desolations spoken of by Daniel the prophet" is best understood as regarding the ultimate fulfillment of the *type* prefigured by the persons *predicted* more directly in the various passages in the Book of Daniel (9:27; 11:31; 12:11). This is made clear by his parenthetical remark "let the reader understand" (cp. the similar reference to John as Elijah in Matt 11:14-15).

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 175-79; E. Schurer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus* (New York: Schocken, 1961) 82-87.

the six-fold purpose enumerated in 9:24 and the destruction of the city and holy place predicted in 9:26. These are best explained, however, by two interrelated concepts. The first concerns the conditionality of the restoration offered in Jeremiah's prophecy. The second involves the idea of postponement as it regards both restoration and judgment for God's people.

In the immediate context these concepts are evident in the response of Daniel to the words of Jeremiah in the first year of Darius (539 BC). With the time of the promised restoration close at hand, the prophet begins an extended session of "prayer . . . supplication . . . fasting, sackcloth and ashes" (9:3). This response is surprising if one considers the consistent portrayal in the book of Daniel and his friends as the faithful remnant in Captivity.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, it is confusing if the restoration is based on an unconditional promise of God, not related to the spirituality of the people.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, however, Daniel's priestly prayer reveals a concern over the understood *conditionality* of the promises in Jer 25 and 29, coupled with his awareness of the general spiritual failure of the exilic remnant.

Daniel makes specific reference to this conditional element in his assertion that God "keeps His covenant . . . for those who love Him and keep His commandments" (9:4). This agrees with Jeremiah's words "you will seek and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart . . . and I will restore you from captivity" (Jer 29:13-14). Just as there was an inherent condition of grace in Jonah's preaching against Nineveh, so elsewhere there are inherent conditions of faith and obedience attached to covenantal "promises."<sup>34</sup>

Daniel's response clearly reflects this understanding. Thus a confession of sin pervades his prayer (9:3-19), demonstrating that he does not view himself or his three friends as typical of the exilic remnant. Rather, he sees this generation as it is pictured consistently in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Esther. It is a reluctant remnant, unconvinced of restoration possibilities, unfit to rebuild God's house, a pitiful flock which is doomed to slaughter.<sup>35</sup>

This accounts for the extension of the seventy *years* to seventy *weeks of years*. Although Daniel pleads with God on the basis of his mercy alone (9:18) to "restore their captivity" in spite of their

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<sup>32</sup>This is the explicitly stated reason for Daniel's deliverance from the lions' den (6:22) and is implied with regard to his associates in their furnace experience (3:13-18).

<sup>33</sup>So Feinberg, "Exegetical," 190.

<sup>34</sup>Another example is God's covenant with David; cp. the original encounter in 2 Sam 7:1-17 with David's charge to Solomon in 1 Kings 2:2-4 and God's words to Solomon in 2 Chr 7:17-22. Clearly David understood the inherent conditionality of the covenant at the outset and communicated the same to Solomon just before his death.

<sup>35</sup>For a more complete development of this concept as it relates to three of these books, see R. W. Pierce, "Literary Connectors and A Haggai/Zechariah/Malachi Corpus," *JETS* 27 (1984) 277-89; "A Thematic Development of the Haggai/Zechariah/Malachi Corpus," *JETS* 27 (1984) 401-11.

"sin . . . iniquity . . . and wickedness . . ." (9:5), his words are of no avail. Rather, the negative answer to his prayer literally fulfills the words of Ezekiel which declare that even if Noah, Job, and Daniel were to intercede for the remnant, they could save none but themselves (Ezek 14:12-20).

The seventy weeks of years in 9:24 are linked with the seventy years of 9:2 by the phrases which follow them in order to demonstrate this failure further. For instance, the three-fold description of Judah's transgression ("sin . . . iniquity . . . and wickedness") is repeated in both instances (9:5, 24). Likewise, the city, temple, and people are in focus in 9:16, 18, 20 and 24. The "righteousness" which God expected from His people is set in sharp contrast with their failure. The seventy years of captivity had been meant to turn their wandering hearts back to their covenant Lord. However, because of their stubbornness the promise sent through Jeremiah is not fully realized in 536 BC as anticipated. Further, the message of Gabriel is not a positive one of a "glorious hope,"<sup>36</sup> but rather "a bitter-sweet answer to Daniel's fervent prayer."<sup>37</sup> In sad contrast to their expectations, the time of gentile oppression is *extended* to seventy weeks of years and the seventy years of captivity ends in return, but not in genuine spiritual restoration.

This principle can be applied similarly to the events surrounding the era of Judah's independence under the Hasmoneans, at which time the seventy weeks of years had reached their climax. Sadly, the stated purpose of the "distressful times" (9:24) *still* had not been realized because of the poor spiritual condition of the people. Even though the kingdom had come, in a physical dimension, in the expansions under Aristobulus and Alexander, it lacked the essential spiritual dimension. Thus, the offer of full covenant restoration is withdrawn and Judah's independence is lost after the last week of years and the "detested desolations" of 94-88 BC.

But the principle applies in a positive sense as well, for God also "postpones" the "destruction of the city and the holy place" (9:26) until yet another offer is made in the coming of *The Anointed One* (an event which stands beyond the original scope of the prophecy). Tragically, however, as with the failure to appropriate the kingdom offered in the Maccabean era, so again "his own" (John 1:11) fail to receive by faith this expression of the kingdom. Therefore, the final aspect of the judgment originally predicted in the seventy weeks of years comes about in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70, an event ultimately caused by the "people of the prince," Israel herself.

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<sup>36</sup>Beckwith, "Daniel," 521.

<sup>37</sup>McComiskey, "Seventy," 29.

V. THEME OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL

Table Two (below) demonstrates the focus of the Book of Daniel, discernible in its chiasmic structure.<sup>38</sup> Each of the major units emphasizes the theme of "God's judgment of proud rulers."

TABLE TWO: CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL

CHAPTER				
1	— INTRODUCTION —	GOD JUDGES A PROUD HEBREW RULER		(HEBREW)
2	DREAM OF FOUR-FOLD STATUE			
3	_____			
4	— GOD JUDGES	GOD PRESERVES HIS FAITHFUL HEBREW SERVANTS	GOD JUDGES FOUR GENTILE KINGDOMS TO ESTABLISH HIS KINGDOM	(ARAMAIC)
5	— TWO PROUD GENTILE RULERS			
6	_____			
7	DREAM OF FOUR BEASTS			
8	VISION OF MEDIA, PERSIA AND GREECE			
9	— GOD JUDGES A PROUD HEBREW RULER	GOD JUDGES PROUD GENTILE RULERS		(HEBREW)
10-12	VISION OF PERSIA, GREECE AND THE END OF TIME			

The introduction to the book (chap. 1) presents this theme in terms of the fall of Jerusalem and deportation by Nebuchadnezzar of Jehoiakim in 605 BC, the proud ruler who burned the "scroll of the book" of Jeremiah during that same year (Jer 36).

The second unit (chaps. 2-7) stands at the center of the broader chiasm of Hebrew-Aramaic-Hebrew, with its center in chaps. 4-5. In similar fashion to the introduction, it focuses on the judgment of the two gentile monarchs whose reigns mark respectively the beginning and ending of the seventy years of captivity. First, Nebuchadnezzar is judged for his prideful building of Babylon the Great (chap. 4); then, Belshazzar faces the "handwriting on the wall" for his blasphemous use of the sacred vessels from the temple as drinking cups for his feast on the eve of Babylon's fall to Cyrus (chap. 5).<sup>39</sup>

At the heart of the third section (chaps. 8-12) is the chapter under consideration. Here, as in the previous two sections, the

<sup>38</sup>Cp. Baldwin, *Daniel*, 59-63, who follows A. Lenglet, "La Structure Litteraire de Daniel 2-7," *Bib* 53 (1972) 169-90; J. J. Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature* (Forms of Old Testament Literature 20; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 27-39.

<sup>39</sup>Moreover, even the supporting sections within the chiasm have the judgment of proud rulers as a backdrop to the preservation of God's servants (3 and 6) and establishment of His kingdom (2 and 7).

theme is the judgment of proud rulers. Further, following the "A-B-A" pattern of the Hebrew-Aramaic-Hebrew chiasm, its specific emphasis returns to the judgment of a proud *Hebrew* ruler, in this case a post-exilic counterpart to Jehoiakim, Alexander Jannaeus.

It is interesting to notice that the theme does not follow the chiasmic pattern if the primary object of the seventy-weeks prophecy is Antiochus Epiphanes or our Lord Himself. Instead, one finds that even the literary structure of the book supports the identification of the Jewish ruler at the time of the Hasmoneans.

## VI. CONCLUSION

When all the data are considered, it is clear that a reevaluation of the traditional approaches to the prophecy in Dan 9:24-27 is needed. No longer is it permissible to gloss over basic language, punctuation, and context (immediate and in a broader sense) in favor of a traditional interpretation which reveals more theological bias than sound exegesis. Difficult as it is in places, the text of 9:25 makes better sense as it stands, and thus is not in need of emendation.

Beyond this it is necessary to consider the impact that the spiritual response of the people (or, lack thereof) may have on the fulfillment or postponement of a prophetic passage. In the case under consideration, it not only brings about the very announcement of Gabriel, but, moreover, helps to explain its immediate fulfillment, further postponement, and final fulfillment.

Finally, it should be recognized that the conclusions reached herein support those contributions made recently by several other evangelical scholars (noted above) regarding an essentially Greek/Maccabean perspective of the Book of Daniel, rather than Roman/eschatological. In this study, both the literal fulfillments of the specifics of the prophecy in the person and era of Alexander Jannaeus, as well as the overall theme of the book as God's judgment of proud rulers, point in this direction. Consequently, it seems that the time has come within conservative camps that such approaches to the prophecies of Daniel not merely be tolerated (much less be viewed as heresy), but rather be welcomed and even encouraged as fresh thinking in an area where it is long overdue.



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