

The Liberal-Critical Interpretation of the 490 years in Daniel

9

The book Daniel was written during the Babylonian Empire in the sixth century BC and contains very precise predictions of the later Medo-Persian and Greek Empires. The Liberal Critical view of the Bible, which dominates the academic centers of the world, makes the a priori assumption that knowledge of the future is impossible. It, therefore, must show that Daniel was written after the events it predicts. Its solution is that Daniel was written during the second century BC crisis under Antiochus IV and that Daniel contains no accurate predictions of events beyond than time. But then, Daniel 9 predicts 490 years from the decree to restore Jerusalem until Antiochus, while there are less than 400 years between the Babylonian Empire and Antiochus. These scientists, therefore, propose creative solutions.

This article explains the critical interpretation of Daniel 9, phrase by phrase, but also provides objections to it.

The point of departure

The point of departure in the critical perspective is:

- (1) That the book of Daniel was written during the persecution of the Jews by the Greek king **Antiochus IV**, somewhere between 168 and 163 BC.
- (2) That all the visions in Daniel, even Daniel 9, describe the conflict under Antiochus.
- (3) That the prophecies in Daniel are actually recorded **history in the form of prophecy**.

Antiochus desecrated the temple and killed many Jews. But soon the Jews, through the Maccabean revolt, were able to defeat Antiochus' army, run them out of their country and rededicate their temple. The prophecy of Daniel 9 ends with the accumulation of desolations. In Daniel 9 there is no indication of a rededication of the altar. For this reason critical scholars propose that the book of Daniel was **put in its final form prior to the success of the revolt** and prior to the restoration of the sanctuary services. On this basis critical scholars believe they are able to date the compilation of the book precisely.

Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city (9:24)



Seventy Weeks Daniel 9:25	
• Seven Weeks	= 49 years
• Sixty-Two Weeks	= 434 years
• Sixty Nine Weeks	= 483 years
• One Week	= 7 years
• Seventy Weeks	= 490 years
• From – Until - After	

The
490
years
must
not

include the 70 years. Since Critics must fit the 490 years of Daniel 9 before the time of Antiochus, they must start the 490 years as early as possible. They therefore start with the destruction of Jerusalem. But this was also when



Jeremiah's 70 years start. In other words, Jeremiah's 70 years of desolation are made part of the 490 years (the seventy weeks). For the following reasons the seventy weeks should not include the 70 years:

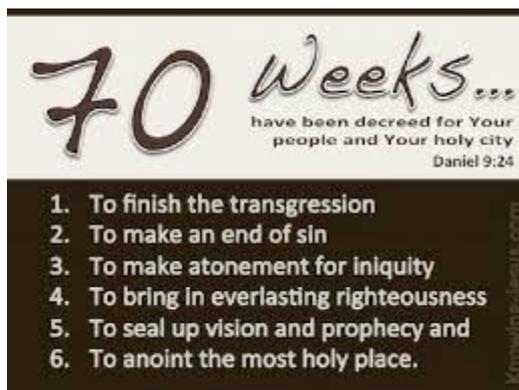
Firstly, the Daniel 9 prophecy was received at the end of the 70 years.

Secondly, the 70 years were **years of covenant curse**, while the 490 years were **years of covenant renewal**. The 70 years were years of exile, which was the covenant curse for disobedience. The promise of the 490 years renewed the covenant. As stated by 9:24, "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city". It is not logical to include the 70 years of covenant curse into the 490 years promised "for your people and your holy city".

Thirdly, the Jewish calendar was divided into **weeks of years** in which the seventh and last year was a **Sabbath year** during which the land had to rest. The promise of 70 weeks is Daniel 9 is based these weeks of years. God used the Sabbath years to measure Israel's obedience. The covenant promises and curses, recorded in Leviticus 26, linked the exile to the weeks of years. It warned Israel that they would be in exile one year for every Sabbath year not observed. During exile "the land will enjoy its sabbaths" (Lev. 26:34-35; cf. 2Ch 36:21). After Israel went into exile, God sent a message to Israel through Jeremiah that the exile would be 70 years. In other words, the 70 years of exile were the penalty for 490 past years of disobedience. The 70 years were not part of the 490 past years of disobedience. Neither should the 70 years be part of the new cycle of 490 years.

For a further elaboration of these principles, please read [The Covenant in Daniel 9](#).

To finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness ... (9:24)



The interpretation does not fit the goals. Why would a faithful Jew, compiling the book of Daniel in the second century, during the period of temple desecration under Antiochus, give these 6 goals for the 8 events predicted in the prophecy? It would require substantial creativity to find application for goals such as "to make an end of sin" and "to bring in everlasting righteousness" (9:24) to the time of Antiochus, particularly on the basis of the critical assumption that Daniel was

written prior to the success of the Maccabean revolt.

The conflict in the time of Antiochus IV was more of the nature of a **civil war** between pro-Hellenistic and anti-Hellenistic Jewish factions than it was a conflict with an external oppressor. "The severest condemnation of the writer of I Maccabees goes, not to the Seleucid politicians, but to the lawless apostates among his own people" (The introduction to I Maccabees in the NAB). It is difficult to see how a second-century writer could link the goals listed in 9:24 a Jewish civil war.

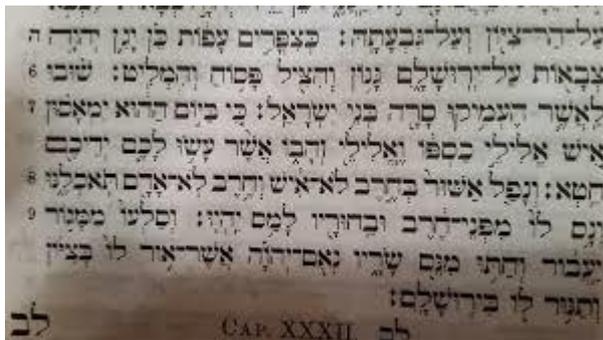
From the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (9:25)

Critical scholars believe that the second-century writer of Daniel obtained the idea of the 70 weeks from Jeremiah's prediction of 70 years of captivity (Jer. 25:11-13; 29:10), referred to in Daniel 9:2. The standard critical approach is that the 70 weeks of years is a reinterpretation of Jeremiah's prophecy. Consequently, critical scholars begin the 490 years with the fall of Jerusalem in **586 BC**.

No decree - But then the 490 years do not start with such a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, as required by 9:25, but with the destruction of Jerusalem. There was no "decree" which speaks of a rebuilding of Jerusalem at that time.

Critics therefore propose that the **announcement by God through Jeremiah** (Jeremiah 25:1-2, 11-12; 29:10) was the "decree" (NASB) specified by Daniel 9:25, but Jeremiah received this word from God 19 years earlier (in 605 BC - year one of Nebuchadnezzar Jer. 25:1, 12). Furthermore, Jeremiah's prophecy was not a "decree to rebuild and restore Jerusalem"

Until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks (9:25)



In the Critical Interpretation Cyrus is the messiah in this verse and he appears at the end of the first seven weeks (49 years). In the NASB, quoted in the heading above, the Messiah appears at the end of 7 and 62 weeks, but critical scholars rely on the Masoretic punctuation—as for instance used in the RSV—which places the appearance of the messiah in verse 25 at

the end of the first 49 years. Critical scholars obtain support for this view from Isaiah 45:1, where Cyrus is called the anointed of the Lord:

"Thus says the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held".

(The Hebrews word translated messiah in the NASB is *mashiach*, and means anointed, and is translated as "anointed one" in some translations (e.g. RSV).)

The next year Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. In the critical interpretation the first seven weeks are then the period from the Chaldean destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC to Cyrus's decree of liberation for the Jews in **538 BC**. From 586 to 538 is 48 years, which is only one year short of the required 49 years (7 x 7).

There is only one messiah. - In the Critic's view, there are two messiahs: The messiah of



9:25 is Cyrus and the messiah in 9:26, who will be cut off, is the Jewish high priest Onias III. (See below.) However:

According to the discussion of the punctuation in the article [When does the Messiah Appear](#), there is no messiah after the first seven weeks. There is only one messiah, and he appears after 7 + 62 weeks.

Two different messiahs in two consecutive verses are unlikely. 9:25 and 9:26 must refer to the same person because both are described as “messiah”.

Why 49 years, and not 70? - Critics view the 490 years as a reinterpretation of Jeremiah’s seventy years. If that was true, should the first subdivision of the 490 years not be 70 years, rather than 49?

Then after the sixty-two weeks, the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing (9:26a)

As stated, the Masoretic punctuation has two messiahs in the prophecy of Daniel 9; one after 49 years and another one that is cut off 62 weeks (434 years) later (9:26). Critical scholars use this punctuation and identify the first messiah as Cyrus and the second as the Jewish High Priest Onias III, who was murdered in **171/0 BC**. They find support in the fact that priests are called “*anointed*” in Leviticus 4:3 and following. In this view, Daniel 9 does not refer to Jesus at all.

Onias was no messiah - The Bible uses the term “*messiah*” exclusively for people that rescue Israel from danger. Cyrus might be described as a messiah, but Onias was no messiah. He did not rescue Israel from anything. Antiochus IV replaced him as high priest with his more liberal brother Jason. A few years later, in 171/0, he was killed. It was only 4 years later that Antiochus IV desecrated the temple.

Onias was not cut off “*after the sixty-two weeks*”. According to the NASB translation of Daniel 9:25 the messiah appears at the end of “*seven weeks and sixty-two weeks*” (9:25) and is cut off some undefined period “*after the sixty-two weeks*” (9:26). But in the critics’ scheme the messiah (Onias) **disappears** (is cut off) immediately at the end of the 483 years.

Does not fit the timeline - The second division (the 62 weeks), in the critical interpretation, extends from Cyrus (539/8 BC) to Onias (171/0 BC). This is only 367 years, 67 years short of the predicted 434 years (62 x 7). Consequently, the full period of 490 years is actually only 586-164 = 422 years. Critics believe that 9:24-27 is history written down after the events, in the form of prophecy. If this was true, then one could rightly expect that the “prophecy” would fit the figures of 49 + 434 + 7 years (7 + 62 + 1 weeks) perfectly, but this difference is accepted by scholars on the assumption that the chronological knowledge when Daniel was written, was not very exact.

Daniel is historically accurate. It should be noted that the book of Daniel indeed contains amazingly accurate historical information (although poorly known during the later pre-Christian centuries). For example:

The author of Daniel is correct in his description of [as the builder of Babylon](#) (4:30). RH Pfeiffer was compelled to concede, "We shall presumably never know how our author learned that the new Babylon was the creation of Nebuchadnezzar, as the excavations have proved."

The author was correct in his knowledge that [Belshazzar](#), mentioned only in Daniel and in cuneiform records, was functioning as king when Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 BC.

On the basis of cuneiform evidence, the vexing [chronological problem](#) between Daniel 1:1 and Jeremiah 25:1; 46:2 has been solved without any discrepancy. (See the article [Is the Book of Daniel a Fraud?](#) for more information.)

These examples show that the writer of Daniel knew history quite well, and would not have made such a massive mistake with the dates.

The people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary (9:26b).

Antiochus did not destroy the sanctuary. In the critical interpretation Antiochus Epiphanes is this "*prince*", but Antiochus never destroyed the sanctuary. He turned it into a temple of his own god. Neither did Antiochus destroy Jerusalem. He destroyed only part of Jerusalem and massacred many of its inhabitants. A second-century author would have seen with his own eyes that Antiochus did not destroy the temple, but only defiled it (1Macc.1:30-31, 39).

And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week (9:27a)

In the critical interpretation, this "*firm covenant*" is the cooperation between Antiochus and the Hellenizing Jews. The Hellenizing Jews are the Jews that adopted Greek customs at the expense of Jewish customs.

Prince of the covenant - Surely the "*prince of the covenant*" in 11:22 must be the same as the prince that confirms the covenant for one week (9:27). But in the critical interpretation the one that makes a firm covenant in Daniel 9 is Antiochus, while Antiochus kills the "*prince of the covenant*" in Daniel 11.

Antiochus did not make a seven-year pact with anybody. Critics argue that Antiochus made an agreement with the Hellenizing Jews for one week, but Antiochus IV did not conclude or confirm an agreement with anybody for one week. His general support for the pro-Seleucid faction cannot be limited to one week. For instance, he replaced Onias with his pro-Seleucid brother a number of years before Onias was killed.

But in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering (9:27b)



In the critical interpretation Antiochus is also the one who put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering in the middle of the last week (9:27). Antiochus did stop the Jewish sacrifices. According to the book of 1 Maccabean the "*desolating sacrilege*"—a heathen altar—was erected on the great altar of burnt sacrifice on December 4, 167 BC (15 Kislev, 145; 1 Maccabees 1:54). This was about in the middle of the seven years after Onias was murdered. In the critical interpretation the abomination of desolation, mentioned elsewhere in Daniel, is assumed to be this heathen altar which Antiochus Epiphanes erected in place of the Lord's altar for burnt offering (see I Macc. i. 54). (Jewish Encyclopedia).



Jesus put the abomination in His future. Critics limit the events of Daniel to the time of Antiochus, but Jesus put the abomination of desolation Daniel's prophecies in His future (Mat 24:15).

"Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)" (Mat 24:15)

Daniel's prophecies, therefore, cannot be limited to the time of Antiochus, approximately 200 years before Jesus spoke. For many people this is sufficient evidence against the critical interpretation. Daniel is the only Bible book which Jesus by name recommended that we understand.

End of the 490 years

[caption id="attachment_4039" align="alignleft" width="220"] Judas Maccabeus[/caption]

In the critical interpretation the last week concludes with the rededication of the altar of sacrifice by the victorious Judas Maccabeus. This is the "*anointing of a most holy place*" listed as one of the purposes of the seventy weeks (9:24). The altar of sacrifice was rededicated on December 14, **164 BC** (25 Kislev, 148; 1 Maccabees 4:52), exactly 3 years after the first heathen sacrifice in the temple.



But do the critics not also say that Daniel was written before the success of the Maccabean revolt? How would the uninspired writer know about the rededication? And why would Daniel 9 then end in the accumulation of desolations? Why does Daniel 9 not mention the rededication?

Why an end? If the book of Daniel was completed before the end of the 490 years, and if the writer did not foresee the success of the Maccabean revolt, why would he postulate a period of 490 years? The Critical Interpretation fails to explain what end the writer has in mind. What was envisaged after the end of the 490 years?

Review of the timeline

The standard critical timeline, discussed above, is as follows:

586 BC: The destruction of Jerusalem and the start of the 490 years

538 BC: The liberation for the Jews and the end of the first 49 years (7 weeks): This was 48 years later; not 49.

171/0 BC: The murder of Onias III and the end of the second 434 years (62 weeks): This was 368 years later, not 434.

167 BC: Abomination of desolation

164 BC: Temple rededicated

One proposed variation on the critical schema is as follows:

The first 7 weeks are from the Captivity in **587 BC until 538 BC**: Exactly 49 years.

The next 62 weeks (434 years) are from the date Jeremiah prophesied in **605 BC** (Jeremiah 25:11-12) **to Onias' death in 171 BC**: Exactly 434 years

The advantages of this proposal are:

It exactly fits the 49 and 434 years required by the prophecy. It starts the 62 weeks with a "word" (KJV).

The disadvantages are:

(1) Jeremiah 25:11-12 does not speak of the rebuilding of Jerusalem at all.

(2) The first two divisions (7 + 62) run parallel to each other rather than in sequence. Israel therefore never received its promised 490 years.

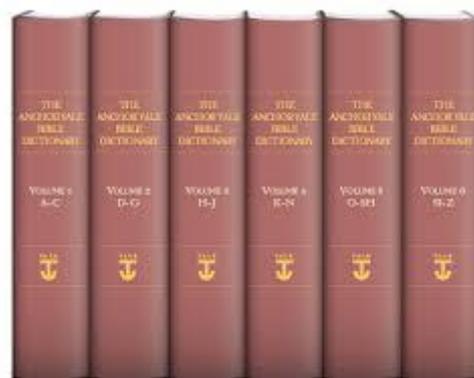
(3) The wording of 9:25 requires "*seven and sixty-two weeks*" (that is, 69 weeks) and not just 62 weeks from "*the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem*" until Messiah the Prince.

[caption id="attachment_4040" align="alignleft" width="255"] Anchor Bible Commentary[/caption]

A slight variation from the standard critical schema is proposed by the influential **Anchor Bible Commentary** by Hartman and Di Lella. They do not start the 490 years with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, but with Jeremiah's later announcement, as recorded in 29:10, which they date to **594 BC**. Otherwise, they remain with the standard critical schema. The benefit of this proposal is that the 490 years do not start with the destruction of Jerusalem, but with a "word", as required by Daniel 9. However:

(A) Jeremiah 29:10 was also not a "*word to rebuild and restore Jerusalem*" (Daniel 9:25 KJV). Jeremiah 29:10 only speaks of bringing back exiles to Judah.

(B) From 594 BC to 538 BC is 56 years, not 49 years. Hartman and Di Lella suggest that



56 years is "sufficiently close to the quasi-artificial figure of 'seven weeks' of years. Not everybody would accept the 7 weeks as "quasi-artificial."

(C) The second section remains too short. The full period from 594 BC to 164 BC is only 430 years; 50 years short of the required 490 years.

Conclusion

The critical interpretation is today the standard view of modern liberal scholarship, but it is not an unbiased interpretation. Critical scholars believe that the Bible developed through a process of evolution, with various people over the centuries editing the text. They also believe, as a priori assumption, that knowledge of the future is impossible.

But the book of Daniel claims that it was written in the sixth century before Christ, and contains amazingly accurate predictions of the history after the sixth century. Liberal scholarship must, therefore, prove that Daniel was written after these events. Their solution is that it was written during the crisis under Antiochus IV and that the book only focuses on that conflict. All the prophecies of Daniel are interpreted as referring to that conflict; even Daniel 9.

But if one counts 490 years back from the time of Antiochus you arrive at the year 655 BC; 50 years before the Babylonian exile. At that time there was no "*decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.*" Therefore critics have creative solutions to shorten the 490 years, as discussed above. No critical scheme reaches 490 years. There is no critical scheme of interpretation that is able to harmonize 9:24-27 with actual history.

A separate article is available which contains more than sufficient evidence that Daniel must have been written in the sixth century BC, and therefore must be inspired prophecy. See [Is the Book of Daniel a Fraud?](#)

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