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The Daniel 9:25 Prophecy

An Exact Timeline For The Arrival Of The Messiah



MICHAEL FILIPEK

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CHAPTER 1

ESTABLISHING THE RELIABILITY OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL

Introduction

Bible prophecy is one of the most remarkable features of Scripture. Throughout the Bible, God repeatedly reveals events before they happen, demonstrating knowledge of history that no human being could possess on his own. But among all of the prophetic passages found in Scripture, few are as extraordinary as the prophecy recorded in Daniel 9:25.

This prophecy does something far more specific than simply predict that a Messiah would someday come. It provides an actual timeline for His arrival. The angel Gabriel told Daniel that a defined period of sixty-nine "weeks," or sixty-nine sevens of years, would begin with a command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem and would extend "unto the Messiah the Prince." In other words, Daniel was given a prophetic countdown to the arrival of Israel's Messiah.

That is an astonishing claim, but it is also one that can actually be examined and tested. If we can identify the historical command that began the countdown, determine when it was issued, identify the ending event described as the coming of "Messiah the Prince," and

then calculate the time between those two points, we can compare the prophecy directly with recorded history.

That is exactly what this study will attempt to do. We will begin by establishing that the Book of Daniel existed long before the events we will be examining. From there, we will identify the beginning and ending points of the prophecy, determine their historical dates, and then test whether the sixty-nine-week timeline actually fits. Finally, we will examine several remarkable historical, astronomical, rabbinic, scriptural, and even miraculous confirmations that further strengthen the case.

If the dates do not fit the prophetic timeline, then the claim that Daniel 9:25 accurately predicted the Messiah's arrival cannot stand. But if Daniel really did provide a timeline centuries beforehand that accurately aligns with the arrival of Jesus Christ as Israel's Messiah, the implications are enormous. It would provide powerful evidence that the Bible contains information originating beyond ordinary human knowledge and that Jesus Christ truly is the Messiah whom the Hebrew Scriptures foretold.

So let's begin at the beginning. Before we can test the prophecy, we first need to establish that Daniel actually wrote it *before* the events it describes took place.

The Dating Question

As incredible as Bible prophecy is, it is imperative to first establish that the writing of a given prophecy predates its fulfillment. Thus, before beginning with the main content of this study, the first issue that must be addressed is when the Book of Daniel was actually written.

Much of Daniel contains astonishingly accurate prophecy, including predictions that were fulfilled with such precision in history that critical scholars have claimed Daniel must have been written after the fact. Obviously, in order to establish that the Book of Daniel contains genuine prophecy, it must be shown to have been written well before the events it foretells. This will be referred to as

the **early dating of Daniel**, as opposed to the late dating proposed by critics.

Much of the skepticism concerning Daniel's early date of authorship centers on the remarkable prophecy found in Daniel 11, which accurately foretells the history of the intertestamental period. The intertestamental period refers to the historical period between the Old and New Testaments, roughly from the fourth century BC until the first century AD. Since many critical scholars reject the possibility that Daniel could contain genuine predictive prophecy, they argue that it was written much later, around the second century BC, rather than during the mid-500s BC as the book itself indicates. In other words, they claim Daniel was written after many of the events it describes had already taken place, thereby eliminating its prophetic character.

For a fuller examination of the evidence against this late dating of Daniel, feel free to consult the companion study entitled *Establishing the Prophetic Validity of the Book of Daniel*.[1] In that study, evidence supporting the conclusion that Daniel was written during the mid-500s BC is more thoroughly examined.

Although establishing that early date is important for validating the remarkable prophecy of Daniel 11, whose fulfillments occurred during the intertestamental period, the question is much simpler for the purposes of this particular study. The prophecies we will be examining in Daniel 9 find their fulfillments hundreds of years *later*, during the first century AD, specifically between the years 33 and 70 AD. No serious scholar dates the Book of Daniel later than that period.[2] Consequently, even *if* the critics were correct in dating Daniel to the second century BC, it would do nothing to invalidate the prophetic nature of the Daniel 9 prophecy that will be examined in this study.

In other words, we do not need to prove that Daniel was written in the 500s BC for our purposes here. We only need to establish that it was written well before the time of Christ. Let's briefly examine three important lines of evidence that establish this fact and also support a date considerably earlier than the time of Christ.

Evidence #1 –

The Septuagint

The first line of evidence comes from the Book of Daniel's inclusion in the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Torah, meaning the first five books of the Old Testament, was translated into Greek around the middle of the third century BC, with the remaining Old Testament books following during the second century BC.[3] Daniel was therefore translated into Greek long before the time of Christ.

At minimum, this proves that the Book of Daniel had already been written and was in circulation centuries before the first-century fulfillments of the prophecies in Daniel 9. Its translation into Greek also indicates that, by that time, it had already gained sufficient recognition within the Jewish community to be included among the Scriptures being translated.

Evidence #2 – The Dead Sea Scrolls

The second line of evidence comes from the manuscript fragments of Daniel discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran beginning in 1947. These finds include fragments representing every chapter of Daniel except Chapter 12. Of particular interest are five small fragments from Cave 4 containing portions of Daniel's prayer in Chapter 9, the very chapter at the center of this study.[4]

The significance of the Daniel manuscripts from Qumran became widely known through the work of Harvard scholar Frank Moore Cross. In the second edition of *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies*, published in 1961, Cross wrote:

> One copy of Daniel is inscribed in the script of the **late second century B.C.**[5]

So, fragmentary copies of Daniel found among the Dead Sea Scrolls have been dated as early as the second century BC, very close to the

same general period in which many critical scholars place the *original* composition of the book. This creates a serious difficulty for the late-dating position. By that time, Daniel was not simply being composed, but was already being widely venerated, copied and circulated among Jewish communities.

When this evidence is considered together with Daniel's translation into Greek, it strongly indicates that the book had already existed for some time. In 1969, based upon the Qumran evidence then available, Old Testament scholar Roland K. Harrison went so far as to conclude that the late dating of Daniel was "absolutely precluded by the evidence from Qumran."[6]

Evidence #3 – Josephus and Alexander the Great

The third line of evidence supporting Daniel's early authorship comes from an important historical account preserved by the well-known first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus. In *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XI, Chapter 8.5, Josephus records that during Alexander the Great's conquest of the region around 332 BC, the Jewish High Priest Jaddua showed Alexander the Book of Daniel, including prophetic references describing the overthrow of the Persian Empire by the Greeks. Josephus records:

> And when the book of Daniel was showed him, wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, **he supposed that himself was the person intended**.[7]

Josephus goes on to say that Alexander was so impressed by what he was shown that he granted favors to the Jews and allowed them to continue observing their laws and customs.[8] Josephus plainly presents this as a historical event taking place in the early 330s BC. If his account is accurate, it would place the existence of the Book of Daniel well before the rise of the Greek Empire, providing powerful historical corroboration of its early date.

These three lines of evidence establish beyond dispute the point most important for this study: the Book of Daniel existed long before the time of Jesus Christ, which means that the Daniel 9 prophecy predates its first-century fulfillment. They also provide evidence supporting the conclusion that Daniel was written considerably earlier than the second-century date proposed by many critics.

Has the Text of Daniel Been Reliably Preserved?

But there is one final question we should address. Even if Daniel was written before the events it foretells, can we also be confident that the text found in our Bibles today has been faithfully preserved? Could the prophecies have been significantly altered during the centuries that followed?

The Hebrew and Aramaic text of Daniel found in most modern English Bibles comes from the Masoretic textual tradition, the standard Hebrew textual tradition carefully preserved and transmitted by Jewish scribes in the centuries after Christ. Among the earliest surviving major witnesses to this tradition are the Aleppo Codex, written around 930 AD, and the Leningrad Codex, dated to 1008 AD, the oldest complete surviving manuscript of the Hebrew Bible.[9] (A codex is an ancient manuscript book.)

Why does this matter? Because the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls gave scholars Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts of Daniel more than a thousand years older than these medieval Masoretic witnesses. Scholars could now directly compare the text of Daniel preserved *before* the time of Christ with the Hebrew and Aramaic textual tradition preserved *more than a millennium later*. Put another way, the Dead Sea Scrolls allow us to examine more than two thousand years of textual transmission and ask a straightforward question: How much did the text of Daniel actually change?

When scholars compared these ancient Daniel manuscripts with the much later Masoretic Text, they found that the text had changed remarkably little over more than a thousand years of transmission. Scholar Alfred Mertens summarized the evidence this way:

> The Daniel fragments from Caves 1 and 6 reveal, on the whole, that **the later Masoretic text is preserved in a good, hardly changed form**. They are thus a valuable witness to the **great faithfulness with which the sacred text has been transmitted.**[10]

The Dead Sea Scrolls therefore provide powerful textual witnesses to the faithful preservation of Daniel. They demonstrate that the Hebrew and Aramaic text underlying modern translations of Daniel has been transmitted with remarkable stability down through time.

Conclusion

We can therefore establish the two facts that matter most before beginning our investigation of Daniel 9:25. First, the Book of Daniel existed long before the time of Jesus Christ and therefore long before the events we will be examining. Second, the ancient manuscript evidence demonstrates that its text has been reliably preserved.

With those two points established, we can now turn our attention to the astonishing prophecy found in Daniel 9.

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CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING THE SEVENTY WEEKS PROPHECY

With the reliability of the Book of Daniel established, we can now turn our attention to the prophecy itself. Before focusing specifically on the remarkable countdown given in Daniel 9:25, however, it is important to understand the larger seventy weeks prophecy of which it is a part.

The Historical Setting of Daniel 9

Around 605 BC, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar subdued the kingdom of Judah and brought it under Babylonian control. At that time, members of the Judean royal family and Jerusalem's aristocracy were deported to Babylon, including Daniel, who was probably still a teenager. Daniel would spend nearly the next seventy years living in exile.

Before this Babylonian conquest, God had revealed through the prophet Jeremiah that He would use Babylon as His instrument of judgment against the rebellious kingdom of Judah and that this period of judgment would last seventy years. This seventy-year period should not be confused with the seventy weeks prophecy that we are about to examine. Near the end of Daniel's life, he was reading these prophe-

cies of Jeremiah and recognized that the seventy years were nearing their completion (Daniel 9:2; Jeremiah 25:11-12).

With this understanding, Daniel turned to God in fervent prayer. He confessed the sins of Israel and pleaded for the restoration of Jerusalem and the sanctuary that had been destroyed by the Babylonians (Daniel 9:3-19). As the seventy years foretold by Jeremiah approached their end, Daniel naturally looked toward the promised restoration of his people and Jerusalem.

It was in response to this prayer that the angel Gabriel appeared to Daniel and revealed that God's prophetic program for Israel and Jerusalem extended far beyond the end of the Babylonian captivity. Israel's ultimate restoration would unfold according to another prophetic period also characterized by the number seventy, but this time it would consist of seventy "weeks," or seventy sevens of years.

The giving of this prophecy probably took place around 538 BC, shortly after Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon in 539 BC.[1] Through Gabriel, God revealed that seventy prophetic weeks had been decreed concerning Daniel's people and Jerusalem in order to bring His redemptive program for Israel to its ultimate completion. The final four verses of Daniel 9 contain this seventy weeks prophecy.

What Are the Seventy "Weeks"?

Before examining Daniel 9:25, we first need to read the preceding verse, which establishes the framework for the entire prophecy:

> **Seventy weeks** are determined **upon thy people** [the Jews] and **upon thy holy city** [Jerusalem], to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.
>
> -Daniel 9:24

The first thing that must be understood is the meaning of the word translated "weeks." In modern English, we normally use the word

"week" to describe a period of seven days. However, the Hebrew word translated "week" in Daniel 9:24 is *shabua* (Strong's #H7620), which refers more generally to a unit or grouping of seven.[2] The context in which the word is used always determines the period those seven units represent.

The Old Testament already established the concept of counting years in groups of seven. Under the Mosaic Law, Israel was commanded to work the land for six years and then observe a sabbatical year during the seventh year (Leviticus 25:1-7). Seven such cycles amounted to forty-nine years, after which came the Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-13). The concept of a seven-year unit was therefore already firmly established in Israel's biblical calendar.

In Daniel 9, these "weeks" are weeks of *years*. Thus, seventy sevens amount to 490 years in total. Daniel 9:24 therefore declares that a prophetic period consisting of seventy sevens of years had been determined specifically upon Daniel's people and Daniel's holy city, meaning the Jews and Jerusalem.

That last point is critical. Gabriel did not say that the seventy weeks were determined upon humanity in general. He specifically said they were determined "upon thy people and upon thy holy city." Daniel's people were Israel, and his holy city was Jerusalem. **The prophetic program being revealed here therefore concerns Israel and Jerusalem specifically, and that context must be maintained throughout the interpretation of the passage.**

The Six Objectives of the Seventy Weeks

Daniel 9:24 also gives six objectives that are to be accomplished by the completion of the seventy weeks:

- "to finish the transgression"
- "to make an end of sins"
- "to make reconciliation for iniquity"
- "to bring in everlasting righteousness"
- "to seal up the vision and prophecy"

- "to anoint the most Holy"

These objectives point toward the culmination of the great redemptive themes concerning Israel found throughout Scripture. Although the cross of Christ provided the basis upon which sin can be forgiven and reconciliation with God can take place, the six objectives as a whole have not yet reached their complete fulfillment in the nation of Israel. In their ultimate sense, they look forward to Israel's future spiritual restoration at the Second Coming of Christ and the inauguration of the Millennial Kingdom.

"To finish the transgression" appears to refer to the ultimate ending of the rebellion and apostasy that characterized Israel and brought divine judgment upon the nation.

"To make an end of sins" likewise points toward the time when Israel as a nation will finally turn from her rebellion and be restored to fellowship with God following the extended period known as the "times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24).

"To make reconciliation for iniquity" concerns Israel's ultimate reconciliation to God. The basis for that reconciliation was accomplished through the work of Christ, through whom God has provided reconciliation to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). Israel will ultimately experience this reconciliation nationally when she turns to her Messiah.

"To bring in everlasting righteousness" points toward the future Messianic Kingdom, an age characterized by righteousness under the rule of the Messiah (Isaiah 1:26; 11:2-5; 32:16-18; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-18).

"To seal up the vision and prophecy" indicates the bringing of the prophetic program to its intended completion. What God has foretold concerning Israel will have received its final confirmation through actual fulfillment.

"To anoint the most Holy" appears to refer to the future dedication of the Holy of Holies in the Millennial Temple. The Old Testament describes this future Temple and its worship in extensive detail (Ezekiel 40-48). At the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom, the

divine presence will return to the Temple (Ezekiel 43:1-7), and it will be consecrated for worship during that coming age (Isaiah 56:6-7; 60:7; Jeremiah 33:18; Ezekiel 43:11, 18-27; 44:11-28; 45:13-46:15; Zechariah 14:16-21).

These six objectives describe the ultimate restoration of Israel and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. Because this complete national and spiritual restoration has obviously not yet taken place, the seventy weeks prophecy itself has not yet reached its conclusion. This becomes particularly important as we continue through the passage.

The Sixty-Nine-Week Countdown to the Messiah

Gabriel now gives Daniel the remarkable prediction at the center of this study:

> Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.
>
> -Daniel 9:25

Although the entire prophecy consists of seventy weeks, verse 25 focuses upon the first sixty-nine. Gabriel divides this period into seven weeks followed by sixty-two weeks, giving a total of sixty-nine weeks:

$$7 + 62 = 69 \text{ weeks}$$

Since each week represents seven years:

$$69 \times 7 = 483 \text{ years}$$

Verse 25 also provides clearly identifiable beginning and ending points for this sixty-nine-week period. The countdown begins with "the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build

Jerusalem," and it continues "unto the Messiah the Prince." The Hebrew word translated "unto" carries the meaning of "until."[3] In other words, **the sixty-nine weeks run from a historical command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the arrival of "Messiah the Prince."**

This is what makes Daniel 9:25 so extraordinary. It does not simply predict that the Messiah will someday appear. It establishes a chronological period between a definable historical starting point and a definable historical ending point.

The central task of this study will therefore be to identify these two points in history and then determine whether the elapsed time between them actually corresponds to the sixty-nine weeks foretold by Daniel. As the chapters ahead will demonstrate, the beginning point occurred during the Persian period in 444 BC, while the ending point occurred in 33 AD with the presentation of Jesus Christ to Jerusalem as "Messiah the Prince."

The Gap Between the Sixty-Ninth and Seventieth Weeks

The fact that Gabriel separates the first sixty-nine weeks from the final seventieth week raises an important question. If the sixty-nine weeks culminated with the coming of the Messiah in the first century AD, when does the remaining seventieth week take place? The sequence of the passage itself helps answer that question.

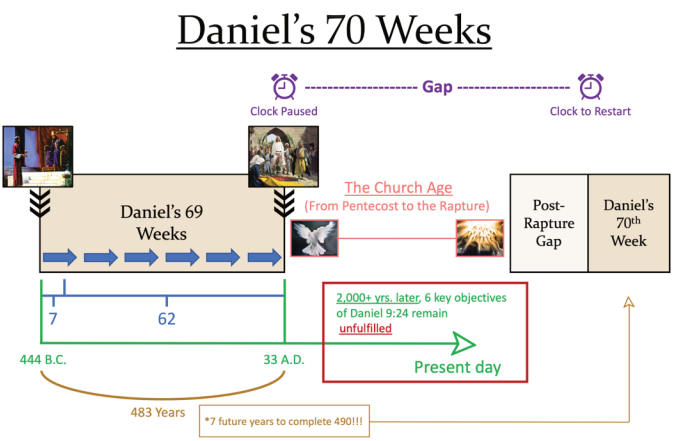
> **26** And **after** threescore and two weeks [after the end of the sixty-nine weeks total] **shall Messiah be cut off**, but not for himself: **and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary**; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. **27** And he shall confirm the covenant with many for **one week** [the seventieth week]: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate,

> even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.
>
> -Daniel 9:26-27

As we noted earlier, Daniel 9:25 carries the prophecy through the first sixty-nine weeks, which end with the coming of the Messiah the Prince. And as is seen above, verse 26 then describes events that occur *after* those sixty-nine weeks, including the Messiah being "cut off" and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem and the sanctuary. It is only after describing these intervening events that verse 27 then turns to describe the remaining final week. This sequence is significant. The text does not simply present all seventy weeks as one contiguous or undifferentiated block. The first sixty-nine weeks bring us to the Messiah, events then occur after those sixty-nine weeks, and the final week is subsequently described.

This becomes even more apparent when the six objectives of verse 24 are considered. The sixty-ninth week ended with the coming of Christ nearly two thousand years ago, yet the full restoration of Israel described in verse 24 has still not occurred. The entire seventy-week program therefore cannot have been completed during the first century. Consequently, there must be a pause in the prophetic count-down after the sixty-ninth week, leaving the seventieth week still future.

This "pause" corresponds to what Christians commonly call the Church Age. Following Israel's rejection of Jesus as her Messiah, God's prophetic program concerning the completion of Daniel's seventy weeks was temporarily interrupted while God introduced His interim plan (the Church), during which the gospel began going out to all nations while disobedient Israel entered a prolonged period of worldwide dispersion.



This distinction between Israel and the Church is important for understanding biblical prophecy. Daniel 9:24 explicitly states that the seventy weeks concern Daniel's people (Israel) and Jerusalem. The Church therefore does not replace Israel within this seventy-week prophecy. **God's program for Israel has been temporarily interrupted, not abandoned, and the final week still awaits future fulfillment.** While a full examination of this topic would take us beyond the purpose of this study, a more complete treatment can be found in our companion study entitled *Understanding the Distinction Between Israel and the Church*.[4]

The Future Seventieth Week

Although this study will focus primarily upon the remarkable fulfillment of the first sixty-nine weeks and their countdown to the Messiah, it is important to briefly understand what remains to be fulfilled.

The future seventieth week is the final seven-year period of Daniel's prophecy. This period is described extensively throughout biblical prophecy and is commonly referred to as the Tribulation. Particular attention is given to its final three and a half years, which Jesus calls the "great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21).

Jesus gives an important New Testament discussion of these future events in what is commonly called the Olivet Discourse. Matthew's account begins with an important lead-in at the end of Chapter 23. Jesus laments over unbelieving Jerusalem, announces that her house (the Temple) will be left desolate, and then looks forward to the time when Jerusalem will finally receive Him:

> Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.
>
> -Matthew 23:39

This statement provides the immediate setting for what follows. As Jesus leaves the Temple in Matthew 24, He foretells its destruction, and then, while sitting upon the Mount of Olives, His disciples ask Him about these events, His coming, and "the end of the world." Matthew 24-25 then records the Olivet Discourse itself, in which Jesus describes the future period of unparalleled tribulation, His return in glory, and the events surrounding the establishment of His Kingdom. Parallel accounts are found in Mark 13 and Luke 21.

Thus, Matthew 23:37-39 provides an important introduction to the discourse because it concerns Jerusalem's rejection of the Messiah, the resulting desolation, and her future reception of Him. Matthew 24-25 contains the discourse itself.

The final half of Daniel's seventieth week will therefore be an especially severe period of trouble for Israel. Jeremiah calls it "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7), while Daniel describes it as "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation" (Daniel 12:1). Jesus uses the same language in describing the "great tribulation," declaring that it will be a period of distress "such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21; see also Mark 13:19). This unparalleled period of judgment will culminate in the return of Jesus Christ, the deliverance and restoration of the believing Jewish remnant, and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. At that point, the prophetic program introduced in Daniel 9:24 will reach its intended completion.

For the purposes of this study, however, our attention will now return to the first sixty-nine weeks. Those sixty-nine weeks contain the remarkable countdown of Daniel 9:25, beginning with a command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem and ending with the arrival of "Messiah the Prince."

At the time Gabriel gave this prophecy to Daniel, Jerusalem was still lying in ruins following its destruction by the Babylonians. Yet Daniel was told that the city would be rebuilt and that a future command authorizing its restoration would initiate the prophetic countdown to the Messiah.

We therefore arrive at our first major historical question: What was "the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem"? Before we can calculate the prophecy, we must first identify that command in history.

---

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CHAPTER 3

THE BEGINNING POINT - "THE COMMANDMENT TO RESTORE AND TO BUILD JERUSALEM"

In the last chapter, we saw that Daniel 9:25 provides a clearly defined beginning point for the sixty-nine-week countdown: "the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem." Before we can determine the date of this beginning point, however, we first need to identify the historical command being described.

This is critical. If the wrong decree is selected as the starting point, the entire calculation that follows will be wrong from the beginning. We therefore need to examine the possible candidates carefully and determine which one most precisely corresponds to the wording of Daniel 9:25.

Four different historical decrees have commonly been proposed as possible starting points. Let's examine each one in its scriptural and historical context.

#1 – The Decree of Cyrus, Recorded in Ezra 1:1-4

The first decree under consideration concerns the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah had prophesied that after seventy years, God would bring His people back to their land:

> After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in **causing you to return to this place** [causing the Jews to return to Jerusalem].
>
> -Jeremiah 29:10

Ezra 1:1 specifically connects Cyrus's decree with the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy:

> Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom …
>
> -Ezra 1:1

This decree probably went forth in 538 BC, shortly after Cyrus conquered Babylon.[1] It permitted the Jewish exiles to return to Judah and initiated the restoration of the Jewish people to their homeland.

Remarkably, nearly two centuries earlier, Isaiah had specifically named Cyrus as the ruler whom God would use in bringing about this restoration:

> 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 44:28

Isaiah again says:

> 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.
>
> -Isaiah 45:13

These passages clearly show that Cyrus played a central role in beginning the restoration of Judah and Jerusalem. Isaiah 45:13 even

says that "he shall build my city," placing Cyrus within God's broader program for Jerusalem's restoration. The question, however, is not whether Cyrus had a role in restoring Jerusalem, but whether the specific decree recorded in Ezra 1 corresponds to the command described in Daniel 9:25. To determine that, we need to examine exactly what Cyrus's decree authorized.

Ezra records Cyrus's proclamation this way:

> **2** 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. **3** 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.
>
> -Ezra 1:2-3

The same decree is repeated in 2 Chronicles:

> **22** Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, **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.
>
> -2 Chronicles 36:22-23

The specific authorization recorded in these passages only concerns the **return of the exiles** and the **rebuilding of the Temple (not the city itself)**. Ezra 3 records that the returning Jews soon began rebuilding "the house of the Lord," and Ezra 4 describes the opposition that temporarily stopped that work. When the project later resumed, the officials of the region asked:

> Who hath commanded you to build this house?
> -Ezra 5:3

The Jews answered:

> In the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God.
> -Ezra 5:13

The officials then wrote to Darius asking whether:

> … a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem ...
> -Ezra 5:17

The repeated emphasis is unmistakable: the decree being appealed to was Cyrus's authorization to rebuild the Temple. By contrast, Daniel 9:25 specifically speaks of a command "to restore and to build Jerusalem" and then adds that "the street shall be built again, and the wall." **Cyrus's recorded decree says nothing about rebuilding Jerusalem's streets or walls.**

This distinction becomes even clearer when we look at the condition of Jerusalem much later in the time of Nehemiah. By then the Temple had already been rebuilt, yet Jerusalem's walls were still broken down and its gates remained burned with fire (Nehemiah 1:3; 2:13, 17). In other words, the city itself had objectively *not* yet been rebuilt. Thus, whatever broader role Cyrus played in beginning Jerusalem's restoration, the decree recorded in Ezra 1 *did not* authorize or accomplish the rebuilding of the city in the specific manner described by Daniel 9:25. Therefore, Cyrus's decree is not the strongest candidate for the specific starting point of the sixty-nine-week countdown.

#2 – The Decree of Darius I, Recorded in Ezra 6:1-12

The second possible decree arose directly from the controversy surrounding the rebuilding of the Temple. After regional officials questioned whether Cyrus had actually authorized the project, King Darius ordered a search of the Persian records. Cyrus's original decree was found, and Darius then reaffirmed it. Darius commanded:

> Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place.
>
> -Ezra 6:7

He also ordered that expenses be provided from the royal treasury so that:

> … the building of this house of God ... be not hindered.
>
> -Ezra 6:8

Based on Ezra 4:24, this decree was issued around 520 BC, during the second year of Darius's reign. The Temple was eventually completed in the sixth year of Darius, in 515 BC.[2] [3]

Once again, however, the subject of the decree is clear. Darius was reaffirming Cyrus's earlier authorization to rebuild the Temple. Nothing in Ezra 6 commands the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem itself. Therefore, the decree of Darius can also be ruled out as the starting point of Daniel 9:25.

#3 – The Decree of Artaxerxes I (Longimanus), Recorded in Ezra 7:11-26

The third possibility occurred during the seventh year of Artaxerxes I, Longimanus, traditionally dated to 457 BC.[4] At that time, Artaxerxes authorized Ezra the priest and scribe, together with any Israelites who wished to accompany him, to travel to Jerusalem.

This decree was much broader than the earlier Temple-building

decrees. Artaxerxes supplied Ezra with silver and gold for the Temple, instructed the royal treasurers west of the Euphrates to provide what was necessary for its worship, and granted Ezra considerable religious and civil authority in the province. Artaxerxes specifically commanded Ezra:

> **25** And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not. **26** And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.
>
> -Ezra 7:25-26

Through this decree, Ezra was granted significant authority to administer law and government among the Jewish population. Nevertheless, the one element required by Daniel 9:25 is still missing: nowhere in the decree is Ezra commanded or authorized to restore and rebuild the city of Jerusalem or its walls.

Ezra left Babylon on the first day of the first month of Artaxerxes's seventh year and arrived in Jerusalem four months later (Ezra 7:7-9). Upon arriving, the gifts were delivered to the Temple, sacrifices were offered, and:

> They delivered the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river.
>
> -Ezra 8:36

But the text still contains no authorization to rebuild Jerusalem itself. That omission is decisive for our purposes, because Daniel 9:25 specifically requires a command "to restore and to build Jerusalem." Since Ezra 7 contains no such command concerning the city or its walls, it does not satisfy the stated beginning point of the prophecy. For this reason, the decree

recorded in Ezra 7 can also be ruled out as the intended starting point of Daniel 9:25.

#4 – The Decree of Artaxerxes I (Longimanus), Mentioned in Nehemiah Chapters 1 and 2

The fourth possibility occurs during the twentieth year of Artaxerxes's reign. Nehemiah, a Jew serving as the king's cupbearer in Shushan, received visitors from Judah and asked them about the condition of Jerusalem. Their answer was devastating:

> The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: **the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire**.
>
> -Nehemiah 1:3

When Nehemiah heard this report, he sat down and wept. For several days he mourned, fasted, and prayed. His prayer bears striking similarities to Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9, as he confesses Israel's sins and asks God to grant him favor before the king.

Sometime later, while Nehemiah was serving Artaxerxes, the king noticed his sadness and asked what was troubling him. Nehemiah explained:

> 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**?
>
> -Nehemiah 2:3

The king then asked what Nehemiah was requesting. Nehemiah answered:

> 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**.

-Nehemiah 2:5

This is the first of the four candidates where the request explicitly concerns rebuilding the city itself. Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah's request and authorized him to travel to Jerusalem. Nehemiah also requested letters from the king for the provincial governors and a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, ordering him to supply timber:

> ... for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the **wall of the city** ...
>
> -Nehemiah 2:8

The connection with Daniel 9:25 is immediately apparent. Daniel foretold a command "to restore and to build Jerusalem," specifically mentioning that "the street shall be built again, and the wall." In Nehemiah 2, Nehemiah asks the king for permission to return to Jerusalem "that I may build it," and royal authorization is then provided for the rebuilding of the city and its wall and gates.

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he personally inspected the destruction:

> And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed **the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire**.
>
> -Nehemiah 2:13

He then gathered the Jewish leaders and said:

> Ye see the distress that we are in, how **Jerusalem lieth waste**, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and **let us build up the wall of Jerusalem**, that we be no more a reproach.
>
> -Nehemiah 2:17

After telling them of God's favor and the king's words that he had spoken unto Nehemiah, they responded:

> Let us rise up and build.
> -Nehemiah 2:18

Here the evidence comes together very naturally. At this point in history, Jerusalem's critical defensive infrastructure (the walls and gates) was still in ruins. Nehemiah specifically asked the Persian king for permission to return to the city and rebuild it. Artaxerxes granted that request, issued the necessary letters of royal authorization, and even provided building materials for doing so. Unlike the earlier decrees, this command directly concerns the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem itself.

Furthermore, the rebuilding took place under exactly the kind of difficult circumstances Daniel had foretold. The precision of this fulfillment must not be overlooked. Daniel 9:25 had said "the street shall be built again, and the wall, **even in troublous times**." The Book of Nehemiah records that the rebuilding took place under constant opposition from Israel's hostile neighbors. Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and others mocked the Jews, accused them of rebellion, and eventually conspired to attack Jerusalem and stop the work (Nehemiah 2:19; 4:1-8). The threat became so serious that the builders had to continue the work while armed for defense (Nehemiah 4:16-18). This provides a striking historical fulfillment of Daniel 9:25, which said that Jerusalem would be rebuilt "even in troublous times."

For these reasons, the command given by Artaxerxes in Nehemiah 2 best fits the starting point described in Daniel 9:25. The earlier decrees played important roles in Israel's restoration: Cyrus authorized the return from exile and rebuilding of the Temple, Darius reaffirmed that authorization, and Artaxerxes later gave Ezra extensive authority concerning Jewish religious and civil affairs. But Nehemiah 2 is the only decree that directly authorizes the restoration and rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem itself.

Conclusion

We can therefore identify the historical beginning point of the sixty-nine-week countdown: **the authorization given by Artaxerxes I to Nehemiah to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.**

But identifying the correct event is only the first step. We must now determine when that event actually occurred. Fortunately, Nehemiah provides us with an important chronological marker. He tells us that the command was given in the **month of Nisan during the twentieth year of Artaxerxes's reign** (Nehemiah 2:1). The remaining task is to determine exactly which year on our calendar corresponds to Artaxerxes's twentieth year.

As the next chapter will demonstrate, the historical and chronological evidence places this event in the spring of 444 BC.

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1. Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible*, rev. ed., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, p. 179.
2. Ibid., p. 267.
3. Richard A. Parker and Waldo H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C. - A.D. 75*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007, pp. 15 and 30.
4. Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977, p. 124.

CHAPTER 4

THE DATING OF THE BEGINNING POINT

Now that the beginning point has been identified with a specific historical event, the next task is to determine whether it can be assigned a historical date with confidence. In this chapter, the evidence will demonstrate that the decree of Artaxerxes identified in the previous chapter was issued during **the Hebrew month of Nisan, corresponding to modern March/April, in the year 444 BC, during the twentieth year of his reign**.

As noted at the close of the previous chapter, much of the information needed to date this decree is already provided in the biblical record. Nehemiah gives us the month and the regnal year of Artaxerxes in which the decree was issued. The main task, therefore, is to determine which year on our modern calendar corresponds to Artaxerxes's twentieth year.

Nehemiah 1:1 states that he first received the report concerning Jerusalem's desolate condition during the month of Chisleu, or Kislev, corresponding to modern November/December, in Artaxerxes's twentieth year:

> The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass **in**

> **the month Chisleu**, in **the twentieth year**, as I was in Shushan the palace,
>
> -Nehemiah 1:1

Later in that same twentieth year, during the month of Nisan, corresponding to modern March/April, Nehemiah was granted permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city. Nehemiah Chapter 2 begins by giving us the date:

> And it came to pass **in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king** …
>
> -Nehemiah 2:1a

Thus, both events occurred **during Artaxerxes's twentieth year**: Nehemiah received the report concerning Jerusalem in Kislev and was granted permission to rebuild it several months later in Nisan. This sequence provides an important clue concerning the calendar system Nehemiah was using.

The Jews used two different calendar reckonings: a religious calendar beginning with Nisan and a civil calendar beginning with Tishri. **Since Kislev occurs before Nisan in a Tishri-to-Tishri year, yet both months are identified as falling within Artaxerxes's twentieth year, the sequence strongly indicates that Nehemiah was reckoning the king's regnal year according to the Tishri-to-Tishri civil calendar.**[1]

To better understand this, it is helpful to review the Hebrew months in relation to these two biblical calendar systems.[2] The two months of particular importance to our calculation are Kislev and Nisan.

The Two Hebrew Calendars			
Modern Months:	**Hebrew Months:**	**Civil Calendar:** (before Exodus 12)	**Religious Calendar:** (after Exodus 12)
Sept./Oct.	Tishri	1st Month	7th Month
Oct./Nov.	Marcheshvan (Cheshvan)	2nd Month	8th Month
Nov./Dec.	Kislev	3rd Month	9th Month
Dec./Jan.	Tevet	4th Month	10th Month
Jan./Feb.	Shevat	5th Month	11th Month
Feb./Mar.	Adar (+ Adar 2 – leap years)	6th Month	12th Month
Mar./Apr.	Aviv (Nisan)	7th Month	1st Month
Apr./May	Iyar	8th Month	2nd Month
May/June	Sivan	9th Month	3rd Month
June/July	Tammuz	10th Month	4th Month
July/Aug.	Av	11th Month	5th Month
Aug./Sept.	Elul	12th Month	6th Month

As the chart demonstrates, under the Tishri-to-Tishri civil calendar, Kislev and the following Nisan both fall within the same calendar year. Recognizing that Nehemiah was using this method of reckoning will be important in accurately dating the decree of Artaxerxes.

There is also historical evidence supporting this type of calendar reckoning among Jewish communities during the Persian period. A Jewish military colony existed on Elephantine Island in the Nile River near Aswan in Upper Egypt during the fifth century BC. Nearly one hundred Aramaic documents have been recovered from this community, including double-dated legal documents that provide valuable information concerning Jewish calendar practices during this period. The Elephantine papyri provide supporting evidence that post-exilic Jewish communities used a calendar reckoning consistent with the Tishri-to-Tishri method reflected in Nehemiah.[3]

The next task is to determine when Artaxerxes's reign began so

that his twentieth year can be calculated. Historical evidence places the death of Artaxerxes's father, Xerxes, in August of 465 BC.[4] [5] According to ancient accounts, Xerxes was assassinated by Artabanus, captain of the royal guard, who had ambitions of seizing power. Xerxes's eldest son, Darius, was also killed during the political turmoil that followed.[6] [7]

Artaxerxes was not initially the designated heir, and the transition of power was apparently not immediate. Ancient historical accounts indicate that a period of political instability followed the death of Xerxes before Artaxerxes finally consolidated control. This provides reason to place the beginning of Artaxerxes's reign sometime during the latter part of 465 BC.[8] [9]

An entire study could be devoted to the chronological questions surrounding Artaxerxes's accession, but such detail is unnecessary for our purposes here. The available evidence supports placing his accession sometime in late 465 BC. For the sake of illustrating the chronology on the charts that follow, we will use December 465 BC as an approximate accession date. However, any accession date during the autumn or latter part of 465 BC produces the same result for the calculation that concerns us here. Thus, for purposes of our chronology, **we will place Artaxerxes's accession in late 465 BC.**

At this point, another important chronological issue must be understood. Ancient kingdoms did not all reckon the years of a king's reign in the same way. Two common methods were used: the **accession-year system** and the **non-accession-year system**.

Under the accession-year system, also called "postdating," the partial year in which a king came to the throne was considered his accession year. His first official regnal year did not begin until the next New Year's Day.

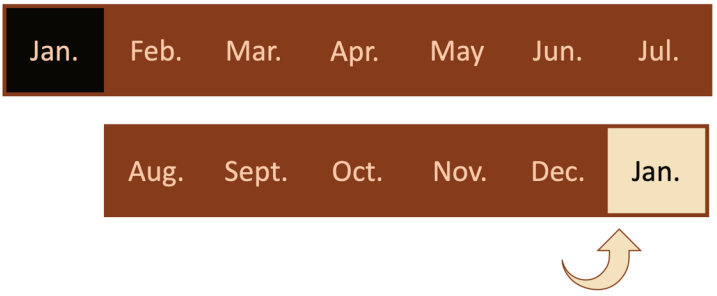
Under the non-accession-year system, also called "antedating," the partial year in which the king came to the throne was counted immediately as his first official year. His second year then began with the next New Year's Day.[10] This distinction can be illustrated using our modern January-to-December calendar:

Accession-Year Dating: If a king came to the throne in February,

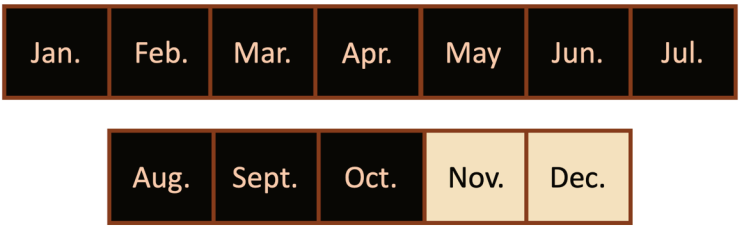
the period from February through December would be counted as his accession year:



His first official year would not begin until the following January 1:



Non-Accession-Year Dating: If a king came to the throne in November, the period from November through December would already be counted as his first official year:



His second year would begin on the following January 1, even though he had actually been king for only a few months:



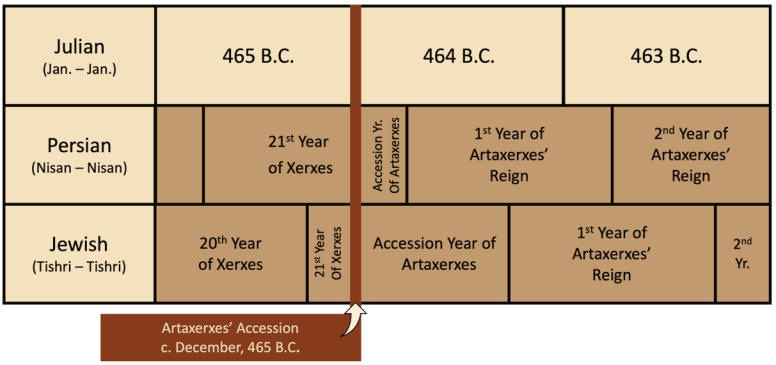
Although this may seem complicated at first, the distinction is important for accurately calculating the twentieth year of Artaxerxes.

As already established, the evidence places the beginning of Artaxerxes's reign in late 465 BC. The Persians used the accession-year system.[11] This means that the remaining portion of the year in which Artaxerxes came to the throne would have been treated as his accession year, while his first official regnal year would begin with the next New Year.

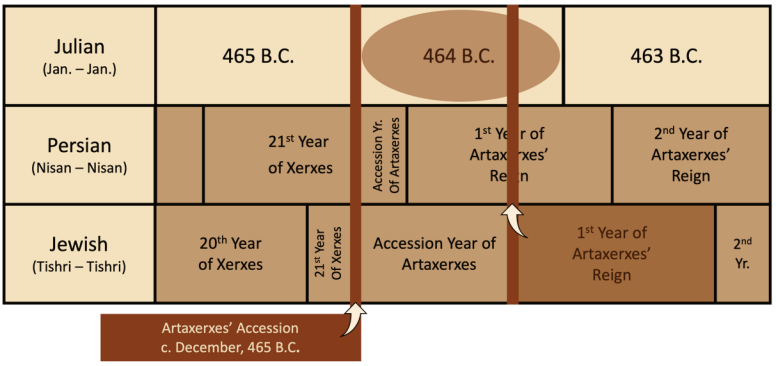
However, the chronology reflected in Nehemiah uses a Tishri-to-Tishri reckoning rather than our modern January-to-December calendar. Therefore, Artaxerxes's first official year under this system would run from Tishri 464 BC to Tishri 463 BC.

This can be illustrated as follows:

The Accession Of Artaxerxes

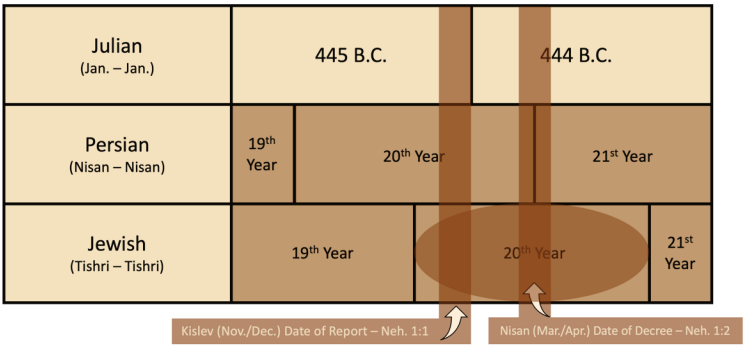


The Accession Of Artaxerxes



Once Artaxerxes's first official year has been established, determining his twentieth year becomes straightforward. **Counting forward brings his twentieth year to the period beginning in Tishri 445 BC and continuing through Tishri 444 BC. Therefore, the month of Nisan within that twentieth year falls in the spring of 444 BC.**

The Decree Of Artaxerxes



This fits the sequence recorded by Nehemiah perfectly. He received the report concerning Jerusalem in Kislev of Artaxerxes's twentieth year, which corresponds to late 445 BC. Several months later, still within that same twentieth regnal year, Nehemiah received permission to rebuild Jerusalem during the month of Nisan, which now falls in the spring of 444 BC. **Thus, the decree of Artaxerxes recorded in Nehemiah 2:1 was issued during the month of Nisan, or approximately March/April, of 444 BC.**[12] [13]

One final point concerning the precision of this date should be addressed. Nehemiah tells us the month in which the decree was issued, but he does not provide the specific day of the month. Therefore, the decree could have been issued on any day during Nisan. Some interpreters have suggested that when no specific day is given, the first day of the month should be assumed. Although that possibility cannot be ruled out, I have not found sufficient evidence to state it with confidence.

More importantly, Daniel 9:25 gives the prophetic period in *years* – specifically, "weeks" of years. There is therefore no need to claim a level of chronological precision that the biblical text itself does not provide. The fulfillment should not be presented as more precise than the unit of time given in the prophecy. Attempting to determine an exact day, hour, minute, or second goes beyond what can actually be

established from the available evidence. For the purposes of this study, dating the decree to the month of Nisan in 444 BC is both sufficiently precise and fully supported by the evidence.

In conclusion, the decree of Artaxerxes recorded in Nehemiah Chapters 1 and 2, which marks the beginning point of Daniel's sixty-nine-week countdown, can be confidently dated to the Hebrew month of **Nisan, corresponding approximately to March/April, in the year 444 BC**.

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1. Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, new rev. ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1994, pp. 52-53.
2. Cyrus Adler and Michael Friedländer, "Calendar," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isidore Singer, Vol. 3, New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1902, pp. 498-508. (https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3921-calendar - Retrieved 10/4/26)
3. S.H. Horn and L.H. Wood, "The Fifth-Century Jewish Calendar at Elephantine," in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Jan. 1954, p. 14.
4. Rick Lanser, "Did Ezra Come to Jerusalem in 457 BC?" Sept. 10, 2019, part of the "Daniel 9:24-27 Project" article series, Associates For Biblical Research. (https://biblearchaeology.org/research-articles/did-ezra-come-to-jerusalem-in-457-bc/ - Retrieved 10/4/26)
5. Julia Neuffer, "The Accession of Artaxerxes I," in *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1968, p. 63. (https://www.andrews.edu/library/car/cardigital/Periodicals/AUSS/1968-1/1968-1-05.pdf - Retrieved 2/10/21)
6. Lanser.
7. Neuffer, pp. 64-65.
8. Lanser.
9. Neuffer, pp. 69-70, 85-86.
10. Thiele, pp. 43-45, 231.
11. Ibid., p. 4.
12. Parker and Dubberstein, p. 32.
13. Herman H. Goldstine, *New and Full Moons, 1001 B.C. to A.D. 1651*, Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, Vol. 94, Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1973, p. 47.

CHAPTER 5

THE ENDING POINT - "THE MESSIAH THE PRINCE"

In the previous chapter, it was established that the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, issued by Artaxerxes Longimanus during the month of Nisan, or March/April, of 444 BC, marks the beginning point of the Daniel 9:25 countdown. Let's again review the main scriptural passage before turning our attention to the ending point of this sixty-nine-week countdown:

> Know therefore and understand, that **from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks** [7 + 62 = 69 weeks of years]: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.
>
> -Daniel 9:25

What Does "Messiah the Prince" Mean?

The next question is obvious: What event marks the *ending* point of this prophecy? Daniel tells us that the sixty-nine weeks extend "unto the Messiah the Prince." The expression "Messiah the Prince" means

"the anointed ruler," or the anointed prince or king. In Hebrew, the expression is *meschiach nagid* (*meschiach* – Strong's #H4899; *nagid* – Strong's #H5057).[1]

How should we proceed from here? The logical approach is to identify the expected Messiah and then determine whether there was a specific occasion when He presented Himself to Israel as its anointed ruler and King.

For Christians, the obvious messianic candidate is Jesus Christ. But does He fit the evidence? There is significance even in the title "Jesus Christ." The name Jesus comes from the Hebrew meaning "Yahweh saves," while the title Christ comes from the Greek word *christos*, meaning "anointed," the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *meschiach*, or "Messiah."[2] E.W. Bullinger notes that the term used in Daniel 9:25 was understood in Jewish interpretation in connection with the expected anointed ruler and redeemer of Israel.[3] We will examine additional Jewish testimony concerning the expected Messiah later in this study.

If the sixty-nine weeks are to terminate with the arrival of the *meschiach nagid*, the "Messiah the Prince," and Jesus is that Messiah, then an important question follows: Was there a particular occasion when Jesus publicly presented Himself to Israel as its messianic King? There absolutely was!

The King Comes to Jerusalem

The gospels often describe the enthusiasm of the crowds that followed Jesus. On one occasion, after Jesus fed the five thousand, the people even attempted to take Him by force and make Him king. But Jesus refused to allow it to happen yet.

> When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.
>
> -John 6:15

Jesus would not permit the people to publicly install Him as King at that time.

But later, something dramatically different happened. Jesus not only allowed, but deliberately *arranged* it. He instructed His disciples on where to find a donkey and what to say in order to obtain it. He then rode the donkey into Jerusalem in deliberate fulfillment of the King Messiah prophecy of Zechariah 9:9:

> Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, **thy King cometh unto thee:** he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.
>
> -Zechariah 9:9

Notice the specific language of this prophecy: "thy **King** cometh unto thee." The prophecy anticipates the messianic King of Israel coming publicly to Jerusalem. The following excerpt is John's account of the fulfillment of this event.

> **12** On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, **13** Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: **Blessed is the King of Israel** that cometh in the name of the Lord. **14** And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, **15** Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, **thy King cometh,** sitting on an ass's colt. **16** These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him.
>
> -John 12:12-16

This event is commonly known as Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Unlike the earlier attempt in John 6 to make Him king, Jesus did not withdraw. He deliberately entered Jerusalem in fulfillment of the prophecy, "thy King cometh unto thee," and accepted the public acclamation of the masses who hailed Him as "the King of Israel." The Triumphal Entry was therefore the first and only occasion

during Jesus' earthly ministry when He deliberately allowed the assembled crowds to publicly proclaim Him as Israel's messianic King.

The event occurred only days before His crucifixion. Although Christianity traditionally commemorates the Triumphal Entry on Palm Sunday, the chronological evidence examined later in this study indicates that it actually occurred on a Monday.

"This Is the Day" – Psalm 118

There is still more evidence identifying the significance of this particular day. Most Christians are familiar with the following verse, but may never have understood the specific day it speaks of.

> **This is the day** which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.
>
> -Psalm 118:24

This verse is commonly applied to any day God has given us, and certainly believers can rejoice in every day that comes from Him. But within Psalm 118 itself, the verse appears in a distinctly messianic context pointing toward a particular future day. Only two verses later we read:

> Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord …
>
> -Psalm 118:26a

All four gospel accounts of the Triumphal Entry – Matthew 21, Mark 11, Luke 19, and John 12 – record Jesus riding into Jerusalem while the crowds worshipped Him. Matthew records:

> And **the multitudes** that went before, and that followed, **cried, saying**, Hosanna to the son of David: **Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord;** Hosanna in the highest.
>
> -Matthew 21:9

The crowds were quoting directly from Psalm 118:26. Thus, the same Psalm that declares, "This is the day which the Lord hath made," shortly afterward describes the prophetic coming of a messianic figure who is greeted with the words, "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Luke makes the royal meaning even more explicit:

> Saying, Blessed be **the King** that **cometh in the name of the Lord:** peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.
>
> -Luke 19:38

Notice Luke's specific mention of "the King." The crowds were not simply welcoming a popular teacher. They were proclaiming Jesus as the King who came "in the name of the Lord," using the prophetic messianic language of Psalm 118 while He simultaneously fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy that Jerusalem's Messiah King would come riding upon a donkey. These passages identify the Triumphal Entry as the extraordinary "day" anticipated in Psalm 118 – the day when Israel's Messiah King would come to Jerusalem and be received with the words, "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

There is also later Jewish testimony confirming that Psalm 118 and the waving of branches were understood in a messianic context. The *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana*, a rabbinic collection generally dated to the fifth century AD, preserves Jewish traditions connecting the arrival of the Messiah with branches and cries of Hosanna.[4] The waving of branches and the singing of Hosannas were also associated with Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles, a feast containing strong expectations concerning the future Messianic Kingdom.[5]

Although the *Pesikta* itself was compiled centuries after the time of Jesus, it provides evidence that these themes were firmly embedded within Jewish messianic tradition. Against that background, the actions of the crowds at the Triumphal Entry become even more striking: they waved branches, cried "Hosanna," quoted the messianic language of Psalm 118, and proclaimed Jesus "the King of Israel" as He entered Jerusalem in direct fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9.

The Pharisees Understood What Was Happening

For modern readers separated from the Jewish culture of the first century, it can be easy to read about the crowds singing these words without fully appreciating what they meant. But the reaction of the Pharisees helps make their significance unmistakable. Luke records:

> And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples.
>
> -Luke 19:39

Why were the Pharisees so disturbed by what the crowds were saying? Because under these circumstances, their words carried unmistakable messianic implications. Jesus was entering Jerusalem as Zechariah's prophesied King while the multitude greeted Him with the messianic language of Psalm 118. The Pharisees therefore demanded that Jesus silence them. His response to their statement of unbelief was remarkable:

> And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.
>
> -Luke 19:40

Jesus did not rebuke the crowd. Instead, He told the Pharisees that if the people remained silent, "the stones would immediately cry out." Why would the stones have to cry out? Because of the significance of this special event and this special day, which had been prophesied far in advance in Zechariah and the Psalms and anticipated in Daniel 9:25. This was that day! If the people did not recognize and acknowledge their King on this occasion, creation itself would testify. Thus, the Pharisees' reaction and Jesus' response provide yet another striking confirmation of the unique significance of this day.

"This Thy Day"

But the significance of this particular day becomes even more profound. Only a few days later, another crowd in Jerusalem would be crying, 'Crucify Him!' Though many had publicly hailed Jesus as King at the Triumphal Entry, the nation's leaders would soon succeed in turning the crowd before Pilate against Him.

Jesus knew what was coming. As He rode the donkey nearer to Jerusalem, Luke records:

> **41** And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, **42** Saying, **If thou hadst known**, even thou, at least **in this thy day**, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.
>
> -Luke 19:41-42

In a stunningly anticlimactic turn, Jesus suddenly began to weep over the city! This was the Triumphal Entry, the "big day," yet He began to weep. Notice His phrase, "this thy day." What day? **That day that Daniel predicted! The termination point of the prophetic countdown to the Messiah!** That "day" specifically anticipated in Psalm 118: "This is the day which the Lord hath made." He made His appointment and showed up right on time. He expected them to be ready! He expected them to understand that He was the Messiah arriving right on schedule, according to the timetable Gabriel had revealed to Daniel so many years before.

Jesus was essentially saying, "You had your chance, and you blew it." He wept because they had failed to recognize Him, despite the fact that He had gone to such lengths to tell them ahead of time. Because of this, He then declared in verse 42 that "the things which belong unto thy peace" were hidden from their eyes. He announced a period of corporate blindness upon the Jewish nation because they had failed to recognize this day. In other words, as a nation, Israel would continue to fail to recognize Jesus as its Messiah. The Apostle Paul later states that this national blindness will last until "the fulness of

the Gentiles be come in" (Romans 11:25-26). This aligns with the testimony of the Old Testament prophets, who anticipated the eventual salvation and restoration of Israel (Isaiah 45:17-19, et al.). Eventually, they will recognize Him and acknowledge Him as their Messiah (Zechariah 12:10).

In fact, they will even use the same messianic phrase from Psalm 118 to welcome Him at His Second Coming: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." In Matthew 23, immediately before the Olivet Discourse describing the future time of trouble Israel will endure, Jesus laments the continuing unbelief of His people.

> **37** O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! **38** Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. **39** For I say unto you, **Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord**.
>
> -Matthew 23:37-39

In this passage, Jesus makes clear that He had come to gather them and bring them into their Messianic Kingdom, but they would not receive Him. Because they rejected the King, their promised Messianic Kingdom would be temporarily postponed. Instead, the nation would enter a period of desolation until the time of the end.

Jesus also said that the Jewish nation would not see Him again *until* they turn to Him in repentance and finally acknowledge Him as their Messiah. At His Second Coming, this time they will be in faith, and they will petition His return, proclaiming this same messianic greeting when He comes. This future national repentance is also anticipated in Hosea:

> I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.
>
> -Hosea 5:15

The parallel is striking. In both passages, the Lord leaves following Israel's rejection and remains away until the nation acknowledges its offense and turns to Him. Hosea further places this repentance in the context of Israel's future affliction, corresponding with the period of future eschatological trouble that will ultimately bring the believing remnant to recognize and receive its Messiah.

Note: The Hebrew word translated "early" in Hosea 5:15 carries the sense of seeking "diligently" or "earnestly" (*shahar* – Strong's #H7836).[6]

"The Time of Thy Visitation"

This brings us to perhaps the strongest statement Jesus made concerning the significance of the timing of His arrival. Immediately after weeping over Jerusalem, Jesus foretold the city's coming destruction:

> For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; **because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation**.
>
> -Luke 19:43-44

Notice the reason Jesus gives: "because thou knewest not the **time of thy visitation**." His words strongly indicate that Israel was accountable to recognize not simply that her Messiah would come, but the prophetic significance and *timing* of His visitation. Daniel 9:25 provides the clearest chronological prophecy in Scripture pointing to precisely such an expected arrival.

Israel had been given a prophetic countdown leading "unto the Messiah the Prince." Yet when her Messiah arrived and publicly presented Himself as King, the nation did not recognize the signifi-

cance of the time. Daniel's very next verse makes what followed even more incredible:

> And after threescore and two weeks **shall Messiah be cut off** ...
> -Daniel 9:26a

The "threescore and two weeks" follow the initial seven weeks of verse 25, meaning that after the entire sixty-nine-week period, the Messiah would be "cut off." The Hebrew word *karath* means to "cut off, cut down," or "cut asunder."[7] Thus, Daniel not only foretold the *time* of the Messiah's arrival, but immediately afterward foretold that the Messiah *would be killed*. That is exactly what happened. Jesus entered Jerusalem as its messianic King and only days later was crucified.



Because Jerusalem failed to recognize "the time of thy visitation," Jesus also foretold the destruction of the city and Temple. That judgment came soon after in 70 AD when the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and its sanctuary, fulfilling the prophetic warning Jesus had given.[8]

Note: For a fuller examination of this prophecy, consult the companion study entitled *The Luke 19:43-44 Prophecy: The Destruction of Jerusalem Foretold*.[9]

Identifying the Ending Point

After examining all of this information, we can now confidently identify the ending point of Daniel's sixty-nine-week countdown. Daniel 9:25 states that the countdown would continue "unto the Messiah the Prince." The Triumphal Entry provides the event that directly and completely satisfies that description. On that day, Jesus deliberately entered Jerusalem in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy that "thy King cometh unto thee." The assembled masses publicly hailed Him as "the King of Israel" and "the King that cometh in the name of the Lord," crying "Hosanna" and quoting the messianic greeting from Psalm 118. When the Pharisees demanded that He silence them, He refused, stating that if they were to remain silent, creation itself would immediately cry out in recognition of the significance of this particular day. He then wept over Jerusalem because it failed to recognize "this thy day" and "the time of thy visitation." The Triumphal Entry therefore marks the public presentation of Jesus Christ to Jerusalem as the *meschiach nagid* – the Messiah the Prince.

The beginning point of the prophecy has earlier been identified and dated. The ending event has now also been identified. Our next task is to determine its date. If the Triumphal Entry truly marks the end of Daniel's sixty-nine-week countdown, when exactly did it occur? Only after answering that question can we compare the beginning and ending points and determine whether Daniel's prophetic timeline actually fits.

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1. "Anoint, Anointing," subentry "māšîaḥ" (#H4899), and "Rule, Ruler," subentry "nāgîd" (#H5057), in *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, pp. 38, 839.
2. Strong, "yĕhôšûaʿ" (#H3091), p. 1507; "māšîaḥ" (#H4899), p. 1535; "Iēsous" (#G2424), p. 1635; "Christos" (#G5547), p. 1684.
3. E.W. Bullinger, "Christ," in *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament: Together with an Index of Greek Words, and Several Appendices*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975, p. 151.
4. *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana*, ed. William G. Braude, trans. William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1975, p. xxviii; Piska 27:3.

5. Sam Nadler, *Messiah in the Feasts of Israel*, rev. ed., Charlotte, NC: Word of Messiah Ministries, 2006, pp. 53-54.
6. Strong, "šāhar" (#H7836), p. 1581.
7. Strong, "kārath" (#H3772), p. 1517.
8. Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, VII.1.1.
9. Michael Filipek, *The Luke 19:43-44 Prophecy: The Destruction of Jerusalem Foretold*, Springfield, NJ: LetUsReason Publishing, 2026.

CHAPTER 6

THE DATING OF THE ENDING POINT (PART 1) - THE DATE OF THE CRUCIFIXION

The dating of the Triumphal Entry will be investigated in two parts. First, in this chapter, a reliable date for the crucifixion of Jesus must be identified. Once that is accomplished, the next chapter will backtrack several days to determine when Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem. This two-part investigation has been divided into separate chapters because establishing the date of the crucifixion requires a substantial examination of the evidence.

There are eight biblical clues that will be consulted in order to determine when Jesus died, narrowing the date down to the year, season, month, day, and even the approximate hour. This conclusion will not be based upon a single reference or isolated piece of evidence. Instead, these clues will build upon one another, progressively narrowing the possibilities and strengthening the eventual conclusion.

Clue #1 – The High Priesthood of Caiaphas

The gospels indicate that Jesus was crucified at the instigation of the first-century high priest named Caiaphas. This is stated in Matthew 26:3-4 and John 11:49-53. According to the ancient historian Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Caiaphas was appointed high priest by the

Roman governor Valerius Gratus, the predecessor of Pontius Pilate,[1] and was later removed from office by Vitellius, the Roman governor of Syria.[2] Secular history dates his appointment to around 18 AD and his removal to around 36 AD.[3] [4] Thus, history records that Caiaphas served as high priest from approximately **18 to 36 AD**, placing Jesus' death somewhere within that time frame.

Clue #2 – The Governorship of Pontius Pilate

All four gospels state that Jesus was crucified on the orders of the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate (Matthew 27:24-26; Mark 15:15; Luke 23:24; John 19:15-16). Non-biblical sources agree. For example, the Roman senator and historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus (c. 56-c. 120 AD) states:

> Christus, from whom the name ["Christian"] had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus.[5]

Secular historical sources place Pontius Pilate's governorship of Judea from approximately 26 to 36 AD, during the reign of Tiberius.[6] The possible date range for the crucifixion can therefore be narrowed to between **26 and 36 AD**.

Clue #3 – "The Fifteenth Year of Tiberius Caesar"

The Bible provides another clue that allows us to approximate the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Luke gives a remarkably specific historical reference concerning the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist, which shortly preceded that of Jesus:

> **1** Now **in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar,** Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, **2** Annas and Caiaphas being

> the high priests, **the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. 3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;**
>
> -Luke 3:1-3

Luke records that John the Baptist began his ministry during the **fifteenth year** of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. Secular historical sources agree that Tiberius became emperor following the death of Augustus Caesar on August 19, 14 AD.[7] What is less certain is exactly how Luke reckoned Tiberius's fifteenth year. Scholars have proposed several calendar systems and methods of reckoning. Without turning this question into a separate study of its own, it is sufficient to note that commonly proposed calculations place the fifteenth year of Tiberius around 28-29 AD.[8] Of these possibilities, 29 AD appears to be the most likely, for reasons that will now be explained.

Luke's gospel is addressed to "most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3). The title "most excellent" is also used by Luke in Acts when addressing Roman officials (Acts 23:26; 24:2; 26:25), providing reason to believe that Luke was writing with readers in the Roman world particularly in mind. As a careful historian writing within the Roman Empire, it is reasonable to expect that Luke may have used the ordinary Roman system of regnal reckoning. Roman historians such as Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius commonly reckoned the first full calendar year of a ruler from January 1 following his accession.[9]

According to this reckoning, Tiberius's fifteenth year would have run from January 1 to December 31 of 29 AD. This provides the basis for placing the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry sometime during 29 AD.[10] [11] The New Testament indicates that Jesus was baptized by John shortly afterward and then began His public ministry (Luke 3:21-23; Acts 10:37-38). It is therefore reasonable to place the beginning of Jesus' public ministry sometime in 29 AD.

Can we be more specific? Some scholars have suggested that John's ministry and Jesus' baptism may have occurred in the latter part of that year. One supporting consideration is that, within the

first-century Jewish setting, itinerant preaching ministries emphasizing repentance would have been especially appropriate during the late summer and early autumn leading into the fall feast season, when themes of repentance, judgment, and atonement became particularly prominent.[12] Thus, there is reason to place Jesus' baptism and the beginning of His public ministry in the latter part of 29 AD.

Next, we must consider the length of Jesus' public ministry. John's gospel records at least three separate Passovers during His ministry, each occurring once a year in the spring. The first occurred in Jerusalem near the beginning of His public ministry:

> And the Jews' Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
> -John 2:13

Another Passover is mentioned later in Galilee:

> And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.
> -John 6:4

Finally, there was the Passover in Jerusalem at the end of His ministry, when He was crucified:

> And the Jews' Passover was nigh at hand: and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves.
> -John 11:55

Consequently, three definite Passovers can be identified within Jesus' public ministry. If His ministry began in the latter part of 29 AD, the first of these would occur in the spring of 30 AD, followed by subsequent annual Passovers. This makes a crucifixion *earlier* than approximately 32 AD difficult to reconcile with the chronology.



Does this mean that 32 AD must be the crucifixion year? Not necessarily. Numerous scholars believe the gospel chronology allows for an additional Passover that is not explicitly identified as such. In *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, Jack Finegan discusses passages that may point toward a fourth Passover,[13] and Andrew Steinmann argues similarly in *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology*.[14] Taken together, this evidence narrows the possible date range for the crucifixion to **between 32 and 33 AD**.

There is another passage also worth considering because it may provide additional support for the chronology just outlined. During the first Passover of Jesus' ministry, the Jews said to Him:

> Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?
>
> -John 2:20

First, according to a number of scholars, the Greek wording of John 2:20 is best understood as saying that "this building has stood for forty-six years," rather than that it had been under construction for forty-six years. In addition, the specific Greek word translated "temple" in this passage, *naos*, refers to the Temple sanctuary itself rather than the larger Temple complex with its surrounding precincts and courtyards.[15] [16] [17]



Josephus records that Herod began his great rebuilding project sometime after Caesar's visit to Syria in 20 BC, placing the beginning of construction around the latter part of 20 BC or 19 BC.[18] He also records that the Temple building proper was completed in one year and six months – no earlier than late 19 BC, but more likely sometime in 18 BC. Thus, the forty-sixth anniversary of the Temple's completion would have occurred sometime around the latter part of 29 AD.[19] If Jesus was in Jerusalem for the first Passover of His ministry forty-six years after the completion of the Temple building proper, then that Passover would have occurred in 30 AD. Therefore, as concluded earlier, His baptism and the beginning of His public ministry would have occurred in 29 AD.[20]



Thus, by starting with 29 AD and adding at least the three separate Passovers that took place during Christ's ministry, one arrives at 32 AD as the earliest possible date for the crucifixion. Before moving on, however, several additional observations should be acknowledged.

Note #1: Because of uncertainties regarding which calendar reckoning the Jews were using in counting the forty-six years, as well as the possibility of inclusive reckoning, an overly dogmatic conclusion should be avoided. Any calculation of this kind should allow for some slight variability, perhaps a year in either direction. Nevertheless, the exercise undertaken in Clue #3 does help to generally confirm the earlier calculation of the fifteenth year of Tiberius and the placement of Jesus' baptism in 29 AD.

Note #2: It should also be acknowledged that different scholars have reached different conclusions regarding the chronology discussed in Clue #3, particularly the "fifteenth year of Tiberius" and the "forty-sixth year of the Temple." These issues are not universally agreed upon, and the dates proposed for them should therefore be viewed as approximate and capable of varying by several years. For readers who disagree with some of the scholarly conclusions presented here, I would simply ask that they reserve judgment until the remaining clues are examined. Regardless of how these particular dating questions are

resolved, the clues that follow will continue to narrow the possibilities in the same direction.

Clue #4 – Crucified on a "Preparation Day"

Since the weekly Sabbath fell on the seventh day, Saturday, and no work could be done on it (Exodus 16:23; 35:3), the preceding day, Friday, was known to the Jews as the "preparation day." On this day, food was prepared in advance and other necessary preparations were made before the Sabbath began. Josephus, who lived close to the time of Christ, also records this Jewish practice.[21]

All four gospels place Jesus' crucifixion on a "preparation day," immediately before a Sabbath (Matthew 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:14, 31, 42). Mark and Luke make the meaning of the term especially clear:

> And now when the even was come, because it was **the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath**,
>
> -Mark 15:42

> And that day was **the preparation, and the sabbath drew on**.
>
> -Luke 23:54

Thus, the gospel accounts are in agreement that Jesus was crucified on a Friday, the preparation day for the weekly Sabbath. However, John provides an additional piece of information that will become important to our chronology. He tells us that this particular preparation day fell during Passover:

> And it was the **preparation of the Passover** …
>
> -John 19:14

That is to say, it was Friday of Passover week. But John provides another important detail. He tells us that the following day, the weekly Sabbath, was also a "high day":

> The Jews therefore, because **it was the preparation**, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross **on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,**) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.
>
> -John 19:31

Notice the two important statements in this passage: "it was the preparation" and "that sabbath day was an high day." Simply put, Jesus was crucified on a Friday, the preparation day, and the following day was the weekly Sabbath. The Jews did not want the bodies remaining on the crosses during the Sabbath. But this particular Sabbath was also a "high day." **A High Sabbath occurs when an annual festival day coincides with the weekly Sabbath. In this case, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread coincided with the normal Saturday Sabbath.**[22] This important point will be examined more closely in the following clue, because it provides a critical piece of chronological information.

Note: Some, while attempting to defend alternative chronologies of the Passion Week, argue that the term "preparation day" can also be used as a designation for the 14th of Nisan – the day before the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This is generally done to support their preferred alternative chronology of a Wednesday or Thursday crucifixion. However, it is important to note that in the Bible, only the sixth day of the week, Friday, is identified as the preparation day, and it is the preparation for the seventh-day Sabbath (Exodus 16:5), not the day preceding a yearly festival Sabbath such as Unleavened Bread. The term consistently refers to what we call Friday in both scriptural and non-scriptural usage.

For example, as mentioned earlier, Josephus records the ancient practice of Friday, the day before the weekly Sabbath, as being the preparation day:

> Caesar Augustus, high priest and tribune of the people, ordains thus: Since the nation of the Jews hath been found grateful to the Roman people, not only at this time, but in time past also, and chiefly Hyrcanus the high priest, under my father Caesar the emperor, it seemed good to me and my counselors, according to the sentence and oath of the people of Rome, that the Jews have liberty to make use of their own customs, according to the law of their forefathers, as they made use of them under Hyrcanus the high priest of the Almighty God; and that their sacred money be not touched, but be sent to Jerusalem, and that it be committed to the care of the receivers at Jerusalem; and that they be not obliged to go before any judge **on the sabbath day, nor on the day of the preparation to it,** after the ninth hour.[23]

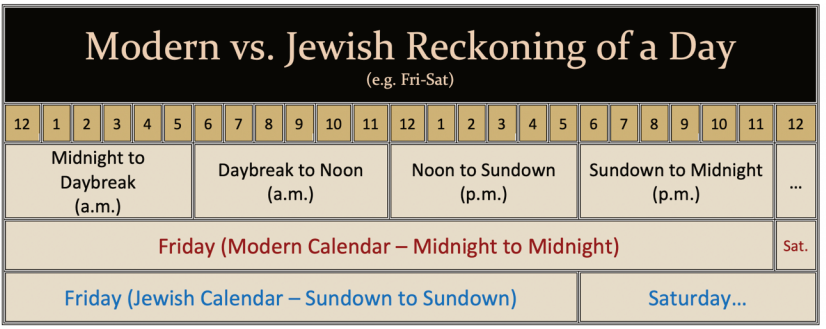
The context of this statement by Josephus clearly identifies the preparation day as the day preceding the weekly Sabbath. There is no basis for the idea that "preparation day" can refer to some other day of the week simply because a yearly feast was approaching. **Thus, it can be concluded that the crucifixion occurred on a Friday sometime between 32 and 33 AD.**

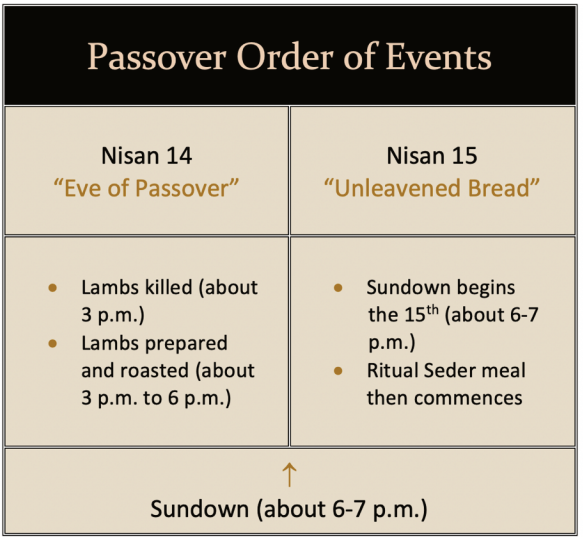
Clue #5 – A Friday, the 14th of Nisan of the Passover Week

As established in the previous clue, the gospels agree that Jesus was crucified on a Friday during the annual spring feast of Passover (Matthew 26:2; Mark 14:1; Luke 22:1; John 18:39). The goal of Clue #5 is to specifically demonstrate that this Friday was the 14th of Nisan on the Jewish calendar – the day the Passover lambs were killed (*Erev Pesach*, or the Eve of Passover).

In the official festival calendar of Judea, as used by the priests of the Temple, the timing of Passover was specified precisely. The Passover lambs were slaughtered on the 14th day of the Jewish month of Nisan (Exodus 12:6, 18; Leviticus 23:5; Numbers 28:16; 2 Chronicles 35:1). The Passover meal commenced at sunset that evening, at

the beginning of Nisan 15 after nightfall (Exodus 12:8; Leviticus 23:6; Numbers 28:17). Keep in mind that the Jewish day runs from sundown to sundown rather than from midnight to midnight, as days are commonly reckoned today. Consider the following charts:





With this framework in mind, it will be helpful to examine several additional passages that associate the crucifixion with the beginning of Passover and provide further chronological clues.

> And **it was the preparation of the Passover,** and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!
>
> -John 19:14

As established in the previous clue, John 19:14 places Jesus' crucifixion on the "preparation of the passover" – the Friday of Passover week. But this alone does not tell us whether that Friday was the 14th or the 15th of Nisan. John 19:31 provides the next important clue:

> The Jews therefore, because **it was the preparation,** that the bodies should not remain upon the cross **on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day)** besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.
>
> -John 19:31

John 19:31 again confirms that Jesus was crucified on a preparation day, or Friday, immediately before the weekly Sabbath. As explained in the previous clue, John's statement that this Sabbath was also a "high day" means that an annual festival day coincided with the normal weekly Sabbath. New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce likewise explains this convergence in his commentary on John:

> ... in that year the Passover coincided with the weekly Sabbath.[24]

Since the context is the Passover season, one of the three Levitical feast days associated with Passover must have coincided with the particular Sabbath following Jesus' death. The next question, then, is which one. For a review of the Levitical feast calendar, consider the following chart:



The three Levitical feast days of the Passover season are shown on the left of the above chart. Passover, or *Erev Pesach*, the Eve of Passover, fell on Nisan 14; Unleavened Bread fell on Nisan 15; and First Fruits fell on the first Sunday after Passover.

Which of these three feast days, then, could John 19:31 be referring to when it calls the Sabbath following Jesus' Friday crucifixion a "high day"? First Fruits can immediately be eliminated, since by definition it occurred on Sunday rather than Saturday. Consequently, the high day must have been either Passover on the 14th, the day the lambs were killed, or Unleavened Bread on the 15th, the day beginning with the evening Passover Seder that initiated the week-long feast in which no leavened bread could be eaten.

Does John's account provide any additional information that can distinguish between these two possibilities? Yes! The answer is found in John 18:28. In this passage, which records the trial of Jesus, John states that the Jewish religious leaders had not yet eaten their Passover meal:

> Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: **and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover.**
>
> -John 18:28

John states that the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem had not yet eaten their Passover Seder at the time of Jesus' trial. As illustrated in the earlier chart, the Passover Seder was eaten after nightfall as Nisan 15, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, began.

Now consider where Jesus' trial falls within this sequence. The storyline of all four gospels records that Jesus was arrested at night and put through a number of overnight and early-morning trials, culminating with His appearance before Pilate early the next morning. Notice the phrase "it was early" in John 18:28. It states that *at this time*, the Jewish religious leaders refused to enter the Praetorium because they needed to stay ceremonially undefiled, since they were preparing to eat the Passover Seder later after nightfall.

John then records that Jesus was crucified later *that same day* (John 19:14), *still before the nightfall* when the Jewish leaders intended to eat their Seder. If the Passover Seder began Nisan 15, then Jesus' trial and crucifixion could only have taken place on Nisan 14. After nightfall, the 14th became the 15th, and the Jewish leaders then ate their Passover meal. Thus, the conclusion is clear: Jesus died on Friday of Passover, the 14th of Nisan, the day the Passover lambs were killed.



The New Testament continually returns to the theme of Jesus dying as the ultimate Passover Lamb, fulfilling the typology of the Passover. It would only make sense that He was crucified on the very day the Passover lambs were being killed, the 14th of Nisan – and this is exactly what the Bible records:

For even **Christ our passover is sacrificed** for us:
-1 Corinthians 5:7b

Based on all of this, it can be concluded that the crucifixion occurred on a **Friday, the Eve of Passover – the 14th of Nisan – sometime between 32 and 33 AD.**

Note: For a more extensive defense of this chronology, including a detailed response to alternative Wednesday and Thursday crucifixion views as well as an appendix specifically addressing the apparent chronological disparity between John and the Synoptic gospels, see our companion study, *A Refutation of Alternative Chronologies of the Passion Week*.[25]

Clue #6 – The Jewish Lunar Calendar Reconstructed

Astronomy can be used to reconstruct the Jewish calendar of the first century AD, helping to rule out impossible dates and identify the most probable date of the crucifixion. Thus far, we have concluded that Jesus was crucified on a Friday during Passover, on the 14th of Nisan, or *Erev Pesach*, sometime between 32 and 33 AD. Modern astronomy can now be used to narrow the possibilities even further.

The Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar, which in the first century AD was determined by observing the new lunar crescent. Each Jewish month began on the evening when the new crescent first became visible shortly after sunset. Thus, the Jewish day began in the evening, and the first day of each month corresponded with the first visibility of the new crescent.[26]

Astronomical calculations have been used to reconstruct the Jewish calendar of the first century AD. Sir Colin J. Humphreys, a British scientist, Oxford professor, and Bible scholar, and W. Graeme Waddington, his astrophysicist colleague, calculated the visibility of the lunar crescent from Jerusalem using modern astronomical methods in which considerable confidence can be placed.[27] Their

calculated dates for the 14th of Nisan during the period from 30 to 36 AD are shown in the table below.

The Dates of Nisan 14 (Passover) in Jerusalem Between 30 and 36 A.D.

Year (A.D.):	New Moon time:		Deduced date of Nisan 14 (Passover):	
30	22 March	19:55	Friday	7 April †
31	12 March	0:25	Tuesday	27 March
32	29 March	22:10	Sunday	13 April *
33	19 March	12:45	Friday	3 April
34	9 March	5:25	Wednesday	24 March
35	28 March	6:10	Tuesday	12 April
36	16 March	17:50	Saturday	31 March

The time of new Moon is given as calculated apparent (sundial) time of conjunction for Jerusalem (± 5 min). The deduced date is the Julian day (from midnight to midnight), starting at 6th hour Nisan 14 and ending at 6th hour Nisan 15.

* Nisan 14 27 A.D. and 32 A.D. could have been on the following day if the new Moon was not detected due to poor atmospheric transparency.

† In each of these cases it is not impossible, but highly improbable, that Nisan 14 would have occurred on the preceding day.

-Colin J. Humphreys and W.G. Waddington, "The Jewish Calendar, A Lunar Eclipse And The Date Of Christ's Crucifixion," in *Tyndale Bulletin* 43.2, 1992, pp. 331-351, and Table 1, p. 335.

Note: So far in this study, the possible date range for the crucifixion has already been narrowed to 32-33 AD. Nevertheless, data from the broader period of 30 to 36 AD is included in the chart. Any uncertainties are noted in the footnotes to the table. As can be seen, only two years within this broader date range included a 14th of Nisan that fell on a Friday (highlighted in red).

Based on the information shown in the chart, there are only two possibilities between 30 and 36 AD for the crucifixion of Jesus. During those years, the 14th of Nisan fell on a Friday only twice:

- **April 7, 30 AD**

- **April 3, 33 AD**

If the expanded date range of 30 to 36 AD is allowed, these two dates are the only ones that are astronomically and calendrically possible for the crucifixion.[28] [29] However, as established by the earlier clues, the 30 AD date should already be viewed with significant skepticism, since the evidence has indicated that 32 AD is the earliest viable date for the crucifixion. A 30 AD crucifixion would appear to conflict with both the "fifteenth year of Tiberius" and the "forty-six years" associated with the Temple.

Nevertheless, for those who disagree with the dating presented concerning those events and still consider 30 AD a possibility, we will leave that date in consideration for now. As the remaining clues will show, further evidence points strongly away from 30 AD.

Thus, even when the broader date range is allowed, **April 7, 30 AD and April 3, 33 AD** emerge as the only two viable possibilities from an astronomical and calendrical perspective. To determine which date best fits the evidence, we will now examine two additional clues – one from secular history and the other from astronomy.

Clue #7 – Pilate and Sejanus

The next clue comes from secular history and helps distinguish between the two remaining possibilities for the crucifixion: 30 AD and 33 AD. At first glance, a series of political events taking place in Rome may seem completely unrelated to the dating of Christ's death. Yet these events would eventually have a direct bearing on the political circumstances surrounding Jesus' trial. To understand why, a brief history lesson is necessary.

Tiberius Julius Caesar Augustus ruled as emperor of Rome from 14 to 37 AD, succeeding his stepfather Augustus, the first Roman emperor. By the time Tiberius reached his mid-sixties, however, he had grown increasingly disinterested in the day-to-day affairs of

governing the empire. In 26 AD, he withdrew from Rome and began leaving more of its administration in the hands of Aelius Sejanus, prefect of the Praetorian Guard – the elite military force responsible for protecting the emperor. Although Sejanus outwardly appeared loyal to Tiberius, behind the scenes he was a cunning and ruthless political figure.

As his influence grew, Sejanus systematically eliminated political opponents and potential successors to Tiberius through banishment, imprisonment, forced suicide, and other means. The Roman historian Tacitus extensively chronicled these political maneuverings, portraying Sejanus as steadily consolidating power and removing those who stood in his way as he sought ever greater control, with the apparent ultimate ambition of seizing imperial power for himself.[30]

Sejanus might ultimately have succeeded in these ambitions if not for the intervention of Tiberius's trusted sister-in-law, Antonia. Because much of the communication reaching Tiberius passed through Sejanus's control, exposing the plot was no simple matter. Antonia nevertheless managed to send a secret letter to Tiberius warning him of Sejanus's plans. Tiberius then devised a surprise of his own. He sent a lengthy letter to be read before the Roman Senate with Sejanus present. Near its conclusion, the letter suddenly turned into a severe denunciation of Sejanus and called for his arrest. Sejanus was taken into custody and executed that same day, October 18, 31 AD.

Why does the date October 18, 31 AD matter for determining the correct date of the crucifixion? Because Roman and biblical history intersect at this point in a way that helps us distinguish between the two remaining possibilities: April 7, 30 AD and April 3, 33 AD.

Pontius Pilate was appointed prefect of Judea around 26 AD, during the same period in which Sejanus's political influence was becoming enormous. Although no surviving ancient source explicitly states that Sejanus arranged Pilate's appointment, the historical circumstances provide substantial reason to believe that his influence played an important role in Pilate becoming prefect of Judea. Historian Paul L. Maier, after examining the historical circumstances

surrounding Pilate's appointment, concluded that such a connection was "more than probable."[31]

It is also significant that Sejanus was notoriously hostile toward the Jewish people. The Hellenistic Jewish philosopher and writer Philo of Alexandria refers to Sejanus's "hatred of and hostile designs against the Jewish nation."[32] Pilate likewise repeatedly pursued policies that antagonized the Jewish population he governed. His treatment of the Jews is well documented in both secular history and the New Testament.

For example, the Romans were well aware that the Jews rejected graven images. Tacitus, though himself disdainful of Judaism, accurately comments in *The History*, Book V:

> The Jews have purely mental conceptions of Deity, as one in essence. They call those profane who make representations of God in human shape out of perishable materials. They believe that Being to be supreme and eternal, neither capable of representation, nor of decay. They therefore do not allow any images to stand in their cities, much less in their temples.[33]

Of course, this rejection of graven images comes directly from the Ten Commandments, recorded in Exodus 20:4. With full knowledge of this Jewish sensitivity, Pilate nevertheless brought Roman military standards bearing images of Caesar into Jerusalem by night – an enormous offense to the Jewish population he governed. In *The Wars of the Jews*, Josephus records:

> Now Pilate, who was sent as procurator into Judea by Tiberius, sent by night those images of Caesar that are called ensigns into Jerusalem. This excited a very great tumult among the Jews when it was day; for those that were near them were astonished at the sight of them, as indications that their laws were trodden under foot; for those laws do not permit any sort of image to be brought into the city. Nay, besides the indignation which the citizens had themselves at this procedure, a vast number of people came running out of the country. These came

> zealously to Pilate to Caesarea, and besought him to carry those ensigns out of Jerusalem, and to preserve them their ancient laws inviolable; but upon Pilate's denial of their request, they fell down prostrate upon the ground, and continued immovable in that posture for five days and as many nights.
>
> On the next day Pilate sat upon his tribunal, in the open marketplace, and called to him the multitude, as desirous to give them an answer; and then gave a signal to the soldiers, that they should all by agreement at once encompass the Jews with their weapons; so the band of soldiers stood round about the Jews in three ranks. The Jews were under the utmost consternation at that unexpected sight. Pilate also said to them that they should be cut in pieces, unless they would admit of Caesar's images, and gave intimation to the soldiers to draw their naked swords. Hereupon the Jews, as it were at one signal, fell down in vast numbers together, and exposed their necks bare, and cried out that they were sooner ready to be slain, than that their law should be transgressed.[34]

Another revealing incident is recorded by Philo of Alexandria. Pilate placed gilded shields honoring Tiberius in Herod's palace in Jerusalem, an action Philo says was done not only to honor Tiberius, but also to "vex the multitude." When Jewish leaders pleaded with Pilate to remove the shields, he stubbornly refused. They then threatened to appeal directly to Tiberius. According to Philo, this greatly alarmed Pilate because he feared that such an appeal might expose the other abuses of his administration. The Jewish leaders ultimately did appeal to the emperor, who angrily rebuked Pilate and ordered the shields removed from Jerusalem.[35] This incident becomes especially significant when considering the later trial of Jesus. Pilate had already learned that Jewish leaders could appeal over his head directly to Caesar – and that such an appeal could bring a severe rebuke from Tiberius himself.

Josephus records another example of Pilate's antagonistic rule over the Jews. He describes how Pilate took money from the Temple treasury and used it to finance the construction of an aqueduct.

When the Jews protested, he violently suppressed the demonstration.[36]

The gospel of Luke likewise records that Pilate killed Jewish worshipers and mingled their blood with that of their religious sacrifices – an extreme desecration to the Jews:

> There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.
>
> -Luke 13:1

Further still, the gospel of John records that even while eventually yielding to the demands of the Jewish religious leaders at the crucifixion, Pilate continued to antagonize them. He placed a notice on Christ's cross declaring Him "the King of the Jews." When the chief priests objected and demanded that he change it, Pilate refused:

> **19** And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was Jesus Of Nazareth The King Of The Jews. **20** This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. **21** Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. **22** Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.
>
> -John 19:19-22

All of this background on Pilate raises a significant question concerning Jesus' trial. As Philo records, Pilate's habitual pattern was to avoid doing "anything which could be acceptable to his subjects," the Jews.[37] Knowing his antagonistic attitude toward them, why would he now surrender to the demands of the Jewish leaders who wanted Jesus put to death? Since the New Testament records that Pilate could find Jesus guilty of no crime deserving death, why would he not simply release Him, knowing that doing so would frustrate the Jewish leadership? That would seem far more consistent with his usual behavior.

In fact, the biblical record shows that Pilate did intend to release Jesus and came very close to doing so. Yet something eventually caused him to deviate from his usual tendencies and grudgingly give in to their demands. What had changed?

The political situation surrounding Sejanus had changed dramatically. Sejanus was now dead, and following his surprise execution in the fall of 31 AD, Tiberius began aggressively rooting out those who had been associated with his rise to power. Many of Sejanus's allies and suspected associates were imprisoned, tortured, and executed. In *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, Suetonius describes the brutal treatment carried out under Tiberius:

> The place of execution is still shown at Capri, where he ordered those who were condemned to die, after long and exquisite tortures, to be thrown, before his eyes, from a precipice into the sea. There a party of soldiers belonging to the fleet waited for them, and broke their bones with poles and oars, lest they should have any life left in them.[38]

Similarly, in *The Annals*, Book VI, Tacitus writes:

> Executions were now a stimulus to [Tiberius's] fury, and he ordered the death of all who were lying in prison under accusation of complicity with Sejanus. There lay, singly or in heaps, the unnumbered dead, of every age and sex, the illustrious with the obscure. Kinsfolk and friends were not allowed to be near them, to weep over them, or even to gaze on them too long. Spies were set round them, who noted the sorrow of each mourner and followed the rotting corpses, till they were dragged to the Tiber, where, floating or driven on the bank, no one dared to burn or to touch them. The force of terror had utterly extinguished the sense of human fellowship, and, with the growth of cruelty, pity was thrust aside.[39]

At the same time, Tiberius began reversing the hostile policies toward the Jews that had been associated with Sejanus. Philo records that immediately following Sejanus's death, Tiberius recognized that

accusations against the Jews in Rome had been false and ordered provincial governors not to disturb their established customs:

> Things in Italy were thrown into a great deal of confusion when Sejanus was preparing to make his attempt against our nation; for [Tiberius] knew immediately after [Sejanus's] death that the accusations which had been brought against the Jews who were dwelling in Rome were false calumnies, inventions of Sejanus, who was desirous to destroy our nation … And he sent commands to all the governors of provinces in every country to comfort those of our nation in their respective cities, as the punishment intended to be inflicted was not meant to be inflicted upon all, but only on the guilty; and they were but few. And he ordered them to change none of the existing customs, but to look upon them as pledges, since the men were peaceful in their dispositions and natural characters, and their laws trained them and disposed them to quiet and stability.[40]

If Jesus' trial occurred in 33 AD, after Sejanus's fall in 31 AD, Pilate would have been operating under a far more dangerous political climate than he would have faced in 30 AD, when Sejanus was still at the height of his power. By 33 AD, Tiberius was actively purging Sejanus's associates and reversing the anti-Jewish policies associated with his period of influence. If Pilate's own appointment had been connected with Sejanus, he would have had good reason to fear that another complaint from the Jewish leaders could threaten his standing with the emperor. An accusation that he had released a man claiming kingship in opposition to Caesar would have been especially dangerous. With this political background in mind, notice what finally causes Pilate to yield during Jesus' trial:

> **12** And from thenceforth **Pilate sought to release him** [Jesus]: but the Jews cried out, saying, **If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. 13 When Pilate therefore heard that saying**, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that

> is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. **14** And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! **15** But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, **We have no king but Caesar.** **16 Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified.** And they took Jesus, and led him away.
>
> -John 19:12-16

Notice what finally caused Pilate to yield. John specifically records that he "sought to release" Jesus until the Jewish leaders threatened him with the words, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend." Against the political background just examined, that threat takes on enormous significance. Pilate had already experienced the danger of Jewish leaders appealing directly to Tiberius, and after Sejanus's downfall he had even greater reason to fear an accusation of disloyalty. A charge that he had knowingly released a man claiming kingship in opposition to Caesar could have placed his position – and perhaps even his life – in serious danger.

This provides a powerful historical confirmation of the 33 AD date. The political circumstances that made such a threat especially dangerous to Pilate did not exist in the spring of 30 AD, when Sejanus was still at the height of his influence, but they did exist by the spring of 33 AD. While this evidence alone does not conclusively eliminate 30 AD, it weighs strongly against it and, when combined with the earlier chronological evidence indicating that 32 AD is the earliest viable date, provides substantial support for **April 3, 33 AD** as the correct date of the crucifixion.

Clue #8 – Lunar Eclipse Data

Based on the evidence presented thus far, April 3, 33 AD has emerged as the strongest date for the crucifixion of Jesus. But there is one final piece of astronomical evidence that provides a remarkable additional

confirmation of this date. It begins with the words of the Apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2.

The Bible records that after His resurrection, Jesus instructed His disciples not to leave Jerusalem until they received power from the Holy Spirit. Although they were still wondering whether He was about to establish His earthly Messianic Kingdom (Acts 1), they obeyed His command and remained in Jerusalem awaiting the promised outpouring of the Spirit. They were still there when the Jewish feast of Pentecost arrived, fifty days after the Sunday following Passover.

At this time, Jerusalem was filled with Jewish worshipers who had traveled there from many different regions. As the believers were gathered together, Acts records that extraordinary things suddenly began to take place: the sound of a rushing mighty wind, tongues "like as of fire" appearing upon the believers, and the disciples beginning to speak in languages they had never learned. These languages were understood by the foreign Jewish pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for the feast.

The onlookers were amazed and confused. They heard their own native languages being spoken by the Galilean disciples and could not understand what was happening. Some even accused the disciples of being drunk. Peter then stood up with the eleven and delivered his divinely inspired explanation of what was taking place, appealing to the words of the prophet Joel:

> **14** But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: **15** For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. **16** But **this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel**; **17** And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: **18** And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: **19** And **I will**

> **shew wonders in heaven above, and signs** in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: **20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood,** before the great and notable day of the Lord come: **21** And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.
>
> -Acts 2:14-21

Note: Peter's declaration, "this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel," introduces the entire passage he proceeds to quote, including both the outpouring of the Spirit and the celestial signs. His inspired application therefore gives us reason to understand both aspects of Joel's prophecy as having a genuine near-term realization in the events surrounding Christ's crucifixion and Pentecost. This does not mean, however, that Joel's prophecy was exhausted at that time. Prophecy can present a near-term fulfillment that anticipates a greater far-term fulfillment of the same prophetic pattern. The Spirit was genuinely poured out at Pentecost, while its ultimate national fulfillment awaits Israel's future spiritual restoration in the Millennial Kingdom. Likewise, the celestial phenomena had a near-term correspondence in the extraordinary signs surrounding Christ's crucifixion, while their ultimate fulfillment awaits the eschatological events associated with Christ's Second Coming. Thus, Peter's words allow both parts of Joel's prophecy to have a real historical fulfillment in the first century while still looking forward to their complete fulfillment in the future (Joel 2:28-32; Ezekiel 36:24-28; 39:29; Zechariah 12:10).

Peter's quotation from Joel includes two striking astronomical images: "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood." This becomes especially interesting when considered alongside the extraordinary events surrounding the crucifixion. The gospel accounts explicitly record that an unusual darkness covered the land while Jesus was on the cross:

> And when the sixth hour was come, **there was darkness** over the whole land until the ninth hour.

-Mark 15:33

Now from the sixth hour **there was darkness** over all the land unto the ninth hour.

-Matthew 27:45

Note: Some have theorized that this darkness may have been caused by a dust storm. A solar eclipse, however, cannot account for it because Passover occurs at the time of a *full* moon, while a solar eclipse can occur only at a *new* moon.

As mentioned earlier, Peter's quotation of Joel gives us reason to recognize a near-term fulfillment of both the Spirit outpouring and the celestial phenomena described in the prophecy. Since the gospels explicitly record a darkening of the sun on the day of the crucifixion, it is reasonable to ask whether the other astronomical image quoted by Peter – "the moon into blood" – also occurred at that time. There is good reason to believe that it did. New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce recognized this possible connection, stating in his commentary on Acts:

> Peter's hearers may have associated the phenomena described in vv. 19f. with those which attended the preternatural darkness on Good Friday.[41]

This possibility becomes especially interesting when the astronomical evidence is examined. A blood-red appearance is a familiar characteristic of a lunar eclipse. During a lunar eclipse, the moon passes through the earth's shadow, but some sunlight still reaches it after passing through the earth's atmosphere. Much of the blue light is scattered while more of the red light reaches the lunar surface, giving the eclipsed portion of the moon its characteristic reddish appearance.[42]



Significantly, writers and historians have used blood-red language to describe lunar eclipses since ancient times. F.K. Ginzel compiled descriptions of ancient eclipses and compared them with calculated eclipse dates, providing a number of examples in which an eclipsed moon was described in terms of blood.[43] Consider the following:

- The lunar eclipse of September 20, 331 BC occurred two days after Alexander crossed the Tigris, and the moon was described by Quintus Curtius in *History of Alexander*, 4.10.2, as "suffused with the colour of blood."[44]
- The lunar eclipse of August 31, 304 AD, which probably occurred around the time of the martyrdom of Bishop Felix, was described in *Acta Sanctorum* with the words, "the moon was turned to blood."[45]
- The lunar eclipse of March 2, 462 AD was described in the *Chronicon* of Hydatius with the statement that "the full moon was turned to blood."[46]

Additionally, in the medieval European annals compiled by G.H. Pertz, lunar eclipses are repeatedly described using similar blood-red language.[47]

Further support comes from the work of F.R. Stephenson, Emeritus Professor of physics at the University of Durham, whose research concentrated on historical astronomy and the use of ancient astro-

nomical records to reconstruct changes in the earth's rotation. Stephenson likewise argues that Joel's imagery of the moon turning to blood alludes to a lunar eclipse.[48] Thus, there is substantial historical basis for recognizing that the image of a blood-red moon is consistent with the appearance and ancient description of an eclipsed moon.

This brings us back to the dating of the crucifixion and Joel's reference to the moon turning to blood, which Peter directly included under his inspired declaration, "this is that." If this celestial sign had a near-term fulfillment in connection with the crucifixion, the obvious question is whether a lunar eclipse actually occurred at Passover during the relevant period.

Using modern astronomical calculations, historical lunar eclipses can be reconstructed with remarkable accuracy. F.R. Stephenson and L.V. Morrison used ancient Babylonian eclipse records to refine the calculations of J. Meeus and H. Mucke's *Canon of Lunar Eclipses*, taking into account long-term changes in the earth's rate of rotation.[49] [50] [51] These calculations closely agree with surviving Babylonian and Chinese eclipse observations.[52]

All lunar eclipses, both total and partial, visible from Jerusalem between 26 and 36 AD – the period of Pilate's governorship – are listed in the table below. During this entire period, there was only *one* lunar eclipse at Passover time that was visible from Jerusalem. Remarkably, it occurred on the exact date we have identified as the most probable date of the crucifixion – Friday, April 3, 33 AD.[53] This provides another striking confirmation of the 33 AD crucifixion date.

Lunar Eclipses Visible From Jerusalem Between 26-36 A.D.

Date*:		Day†:	Magnitude‡:	Time Eclipse Started:
15 Aug.	26 A.D.	Friday	50%	23:10
31 Dec.	27 A.D.	Wednesday	70%	23:27
14 June	29 A.D.	Tuesday	Total	20:27
9 Dec.	29 A.D.	Friday	45%	20:55
25 April	31 A.D.	Wednesday	35%	21:35
19 Oct.	31 A.D.	Friday	25%	4:49
3 April (Passover)	33 A.D.	Friday	60%	Occurred at rising moon
27 Sept.	33 A.D.	Sunday	85%	4:53
11 Feb.	35 A.D.	Friday	55%	4:55
7 Aug.	35 A.D.	Sunday	60%	20.18
31 Jan.	36 A.D.	Tuesday	Total	Occurred at rising moon
26 July	36 A.D.	Thursday	Total	22:14

* Julian Calendar
† Julian day (from midnight to midnight as distinct from the Jewish day).
‡ Fraction of the area of the Moon covered at the midpoint of the eclipse.

-Colin J. Humphreys and W.G. Waddington, "The Jewish Calendar, A Lunar Eclipse And The Date Of Christ's Crucifixion," in *Tyndale Bulletin* 43.2, 1992, p. 345.

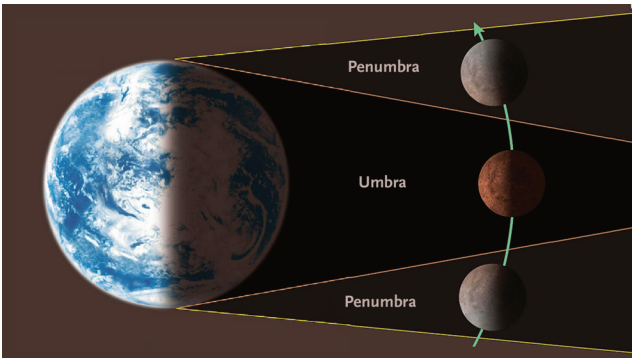
Humphreys and Waddington give the following description of this eclipse:

> Calculations show that the eclipse on April 3, 33 AD was visible from Jerusalem at moonrise. (All times quoted are local Jerusalem times as measured by a sundial.) The start of the eclipse was invisible from Jerusalem, being below the horizon. The moon rose above the

> Jerusalem horizon at about 6:20 PM (the start of the Jewish Sabbath and also near to the start of the Passover Seder in 33 AD), with about 20% of its disc in the umbra of the earth's shadow and the remainder in the penumbra. The ancients, however, made no distinction between the umbral and penumbral shadows and to a casual observer, about 60 per cent of the moon's disc would have been perceived as being "in eclipse" at moonrise. The perceived eclipse ended at about 7:10 p.m. The 60 per cent "bite" out of the moon was positioned close to the top (that is, leading edge) of the moon. Thus, most of the visible area of the rising moon would initially have been seen as fully eclipsed.[54]

Umbra – the fully shaded inner region of a shadow cast by an opaque object, especially the area on the earth or moon experiencing the total phase of an eclipse.[55]

Penumbra – The shadow cast by the earth or moon over an area experiencing a partial eclipse.[56]



As for the *coloration* of the eclipse on April 3, 33 AD, Humphreys and Waddington further state:

> The moon was just above the horizon and was seen against a relatively bright sky background (the sun having just set). The most probable colour of the rising moon would be red in the umbral shadow and yellow-orange elsewhere. At moonrise the initially small yellow-orange

> region would indicate that the moon had risen, but with most of its visible area "turned to blood." … The majority of lunar eclipses pass unnoticed, occurring when people are asleep or indoors. This eclipse, however, would probably have been seen by most of the population of Israel, since the Jews on Passover Day would be looking for both sunset and moonrise in order to commence their Passover meal. Instead of seeing the expected full Paschal moon rising, they would have initially seen a moon with a red "bite" removed. The effect would be dramatic. The moon would appear to grow to full in the next hour. **The crowd on the day of Pentecost would undoubtedly understand Peter's words about the moon turning to blood as referring to this eclipse that they had seen.**[57]

There is also an interesting aspect of this eclipse that the ancient observers in Jerusalem could *not* have seen. As Humphreys and Waddington explain, "The start of the eclipse was invisible from Jerusalem, being below the horizon."[58] In other words, the eclipse had already begun *before* the moon rose visibly over Jerusalem that evening. These details provide striking evidence of a near-term fulfillment of the celestial imagery Peter quoted from Joel: the sun was darkened during the crucifixion, and on that same Passover, a lunar eclipse caused the moon to rise over Jerusalem with a blood-red appearance.

Of the two remaining astronomically and calendrically possible dates – April 7, 30 AD and April 3, 33 AD – *only the latter* is accompanied by this additional astronomical confirmation. When this evidence is combined with the historical, biblical, calendrical, and astronomical clues examined throughout this chapter, **Friday, April 3, 33 AD emerges as the overwhelmingly strongest date for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.**

Now that the date of the crucifixion has been established with a high degree of confidence, the effort to pinpoint the expected date of the ending point of the sixty-nine-week countdown can continue.

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9. Finegan, pp. 338-340.
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CHAPTER 7

THE DATING OF THE ENDING POINT (PART 2) - THE DATE OF THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

Now that the first part of identifying the date of the ending point has been completed – establishing the date of the crucifixion – we can turn to the second part of the task: determining the date of the Triumphal Entry. Once this date has been identified, we will be able to test whether our proposed ending point actually fits the sixty-nine-week prophetic timetable. Based on the eight clues examined in the previous chapter, we concluded that Christ's crucifixion took place on Friday, April 3, 33 AD. The next step is to work backward from that date and determine when the Triumphal Entry occurred.

The gospel accounts provide the information necessary to identify the day. John's gospel is particularly helpful because it gives us a clear chronological starting point. John 12:1 states that Jesus arrived in Bethany "six days before the passover":

> Then Jesus **six days before the passover** came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead.
>
> -John 12:1

John then recounts Mary anointing Jesus' feet and wiping them

with her hair, an act Jesus connected with His soon-coming burial (John 12:2-11). Immediately afterward, John tells us that the Triumphal Entry occurred "on the next day":

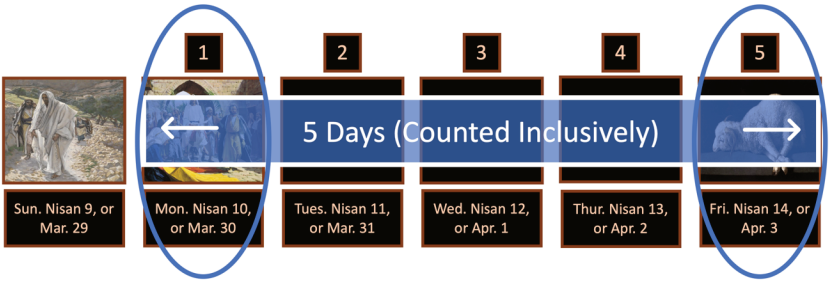
> **12 On the next day** much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, **13** Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord. **14** And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, **15** Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt.
>
> -John 12:12-15

Thus, Jesus arrived in Bethany six days before Passover, and the Triumphal Entry occurred on the following day. **This places the Triumphal Entry five days before Passover.** To reckon these days correctly, however, we need to account for an important difference between ancient and modern methods of counting time.

In the ancient world, time was commonly counted using what is known as **inclusive reckoning**. Under this method, the day on which a sequence *began* was counted as the *first day*, even if only part of that day was involved. The Jews, like many other peoples of the ancient world, regularly reckoned any part of a day as a whole day.[1]

A familiar biblical example is the resurrection of Jesus. The Bible repeatedly states that He rose on the third day, even though Friday, Saturday, and Sunday were not three complete twenty-four-hour periods. Jesus was in the tomb for only part of Friday and part of Sunday, yet these were counted along with Saturday as three days. This illustrates the inclusive method of reckoning used in the biblical world.

We have already identified the crucifixion as occurring on Friday, Nisan 14 – April 3, 33 AD. **Counting backward inclusively, the fifth day before that Friday is Monday, Nisan 10. Therefore, John's chronology places the Triumphal Entry on Monday, Nisan 10, 33 AD.**



What does that date correspond to on our modern calendar? Counting backward (inclusively) from Friday, April 3, places Monday on March 30. Consider the following calendar from timeanddate.com.[2]

Calendar for March 33 (Israel)

March

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Adar 10	2 Adar 11	3 Adar 12	4 Adar 13	5 Adar 14	6 Adar 15	7 Adar 16
8 Adar 17	9 Adar 18	10 Adar 19	11 Adar 20	12 Adar 21	13 Adar 22	14 Adar 23
15 Adar 24	16 Adar 25	17 Adar 26	18 Adar 27	19 Adar 28	20 Adar 29	21 Nisan 1
22 Nisan 2	23 Nisan 3	24 Nisan 4	25 Nisan 5	26 Nisan 6	27 Nisan 7	28 Nisan 8
29 Nisan 9	30 Nisan 10	31 Nisan 11				

Phases of the Moon: 8:◐

Image courtesy of timeanddate.com. Used with permission. (Red circle added by this author).

Thus, the gospel chronology places the Triumphal Entry on Monday, Nisan 10 – March 30, 33 AD. This is the ending point of Daniel's sixty-nine-week countdown.

But before moving on, there is one remarkable detail concerning the significance of Nisan 10 that deserves our attention. Under the original Passover instructions given in Exodus 12, the 10th of Nisan

was the day on which each household was commanded to select its Passover lamb. The lamb was then kept until the 14th, when it was sacrificed:

> 3 Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, **In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb,** according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: 4 And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. 5 **Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male** of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: 6 **And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.**
>
> -Exodus 12:3-6

On the very day designated in the original Passover instructions for the selection of the lamb, Jesus entered Jerusalem and publicly presented Himself to Israel. He would then be crucified on the 14th of Nisan – the very day the Passover lambs were sacrificed. The New Testament later explicitly identifies Christ with this Passover imagery, declaring, "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

But there is another interesting parallel. Exodus required that the selected lamb be "without blemish" and remain set apart for visible inspection until the 14th. During the days following Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, He was inspected and proclaimed to be spotless and blameless (innocent) by no less than the following witnesses:

- Judas Iscariot – "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood" (Matthew 27:4)
- Herod – Pilate declared that Herod had found nothing worthy of death in Him (Luke 23:14-15)
- Pilate – "I find no fault in this man" (Luke 23:4; cf. 23:14)

- Pilate's wife – "Have thou nothing to do with that just man" (Matthew 27:19)
- The Sanhedrin – despite seeking testimony against Jesus, "they found none" that could establish their case (Mark 14:55-59)
- The thief on the cross – "this man hath done nothing amiss" (Luke 23:41)

The typological correspondence is therefore remarkable. Jesus entered Jerusalem on Nisan 10, the day on which the Passover lamb was selected under the original instructions of Exodus 12. During the days that followed, He was repeatedly examined and challenged by His opponents, yet no legitimate fault could be established against Him. Then, on Nisan 14, He was put to death as the ultimate Passover Lamb.

The significance of the Triumphal Entry becomes even greater when this chronology is placed alongside the three prophetic passages examined earlier in this study:

- Zechariah 9:9 – the *method* of the King's presentation had been foretold

- Daniel 9:25, 26 – the *moment* of the King's presentation had been foretold

- Psalm 118:21-29 – the *meaning* of the King's presentation had been foretold

When considered together, the gospel chronology and these prophetic passages allow us to confidently identify the ending point of Daniel's sixty-nine weeks as **the Triumphal Entry, occurring on Monday, Nisan 10 – March 30, 33 AD.**

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CHAPTER 8

TESTING OUR CALCULATIONS

It is now time to perform the final calculations necessary to determine whether the duration of Daniel's sixty-nine weeks actually fits the beginning and ending points established in this study. The beginning point was established from the historical and biblical evidence surrounding Artaxerxes's decree, while the ending point was established from the gospel chronology surrounding the Triumphal Entry. Neither date was selected in order to artificially make the sixty-nine-week calculation fit. This is important, because we can now test whether the prophetic timetable corresponds with the dates to which the evidence has already led us.

If it does, the implications are extraordinary. Daniel's prophecy was written centuries before its fulfillment, yet it provides a specific chronological period leading to the appearance of "Messiah the Prince." If that prophetic period corresponds with the historically established time of Jesus' presentation to Israel, it would provide powerful evidence that this prophecy reflects knowledge extending far beyond ordinary human foresight. With that in mind, let's briefly review what has been established thus far.

The *beginning* point of Daniel's sixty-nine weeks is the going forth of the "commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem." As demon-

strated earlier, Artaxerxes Longimanus issued this command during the month of **Nisan, or March/April, in 444 BC**.

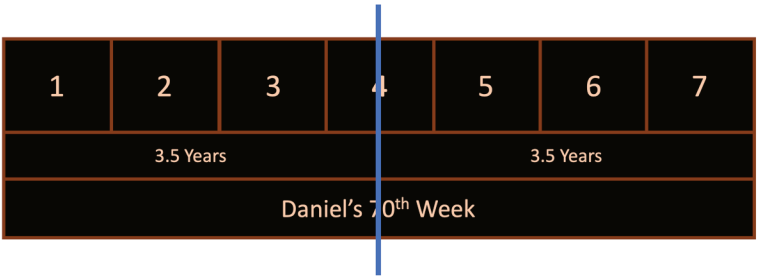
The *ending* point of Daniel's sixty-nine weeks is the presentation of "Messiah the Prince" – the Anointed Ruler – which, according to the gospel accounts, Jesus fulfilled at the Triumphal Entry. This was shown to have occurred on **Nisan 10, or March 30, in 33 AD**.

There is an important limitation that should be kept in mind. Regarding the beginning point, Nehemiah identifies the decree by the month of Nisan but does not give the particular day on which it was issued. Therefore, although the ending point can be dated much more specifically, the beginning point cannot. Our calculation should consequently be evaluated according to the level of precision actually supplied by the text rather than claiming an exact starting day that Scripture and the evidence itself does not provide.

The next task is to determine the length of the "years" involved in Daniel's prophetic timetable. A modern solar year is approximately 365.24219 days.[1] However, Scripture itself provides strong internal evidence that Daniel's prophetic years are reckoned according to a 360-day year. Sir Robert Anderson recognized this as one of the essential keys to calculating Daniel's seventy weeks and developed the principle extensively in his classic work *The Coming Prince*.[2] This same 360-day prophetic-year reckoning was later followed by Harold W. Hoehner in his detailed chronology of Daniel's sixty-nine weeks.[3]

The clearest example of this internal evidence comes from Daniel's seventieth week itself. As detailed earlier, this final week of years is separated from the first sixty-nine weeks by the present Church Age and remains future. It consists of a seven-year period preceding Christ's Second Coming and the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom. Daniel 9:27 explains that a covenant will be confirmed at the beginning of this final week and then broken in its middle:

> And he shall confirm the **covenant with many for one week:** and **in the midst of the week** he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease …
>
> -Daniel 9:27a



Thus, the seven-year period is divided into two halves of three and a half years each. Scripture repeatedly describes the latter half of this period, which will be characterized by severe persecution and trouble, especially centered upon the Jewish people. Daniel 7:25 describes this period as "a time and times and the dividing of time" – another way of expressing three and a half years:

> And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until **a time and times and the dividing of time.**
>
> -Daniel 7:25

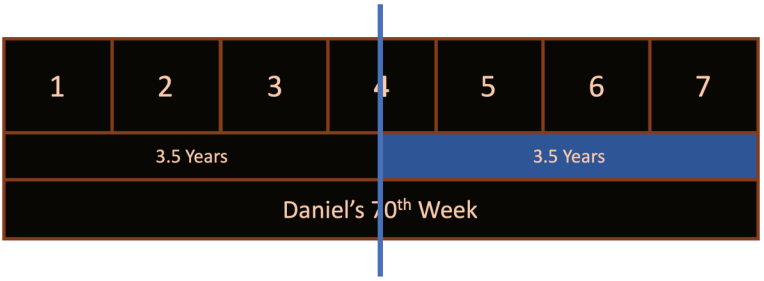
Daniel 12:7 uses essentially the same expression:

> And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for **a time, times, and an half;** and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished.
>
> -Daniel 12:7

The New Testament then provides additional information that allows the length of this period to be determined precisely. Revelation 12:14 uses the same terminology found in Daniel:

And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for **a time, and times, and half a time,** from the face of the serpent.

-Revelation 12:14



Yet several verses earlier, John describes this same period as 1,260 days:

And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there **a thousand two hundred and threescore days.**

-Revelation 12:6

The previous chapter, Revelation 11, also had used 1,260 days:

And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy **a thousand two hundred and threescore days,** clothed in sackcloth.

-Revelation 11:3

But in the verse immediately before this, the same prophetic period is described as forty-two months:

But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot **forty and two months.**

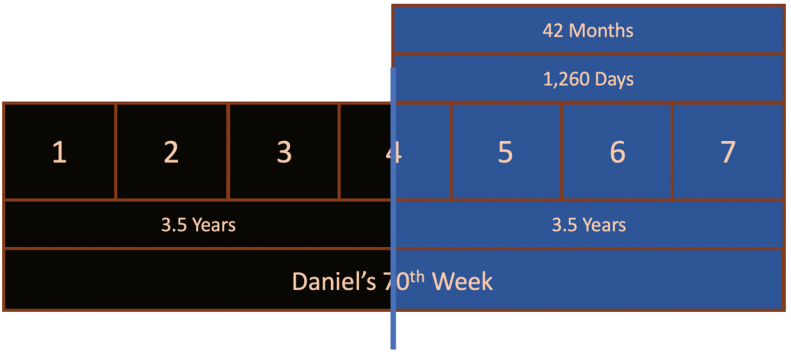
-Revelation 11:2

Revelation 13:5 again uses the forty-two-month designation in connection with this period of persecution:

> And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue **forty and two months.**
>
> -Revelation 13:5

When these passages are placed together, the biblical relationship becomes clear:

3½ years = 42 months = 1,260 days = "a time, times, and half a time"



The key here is that if forty-two months equal 1,260 days, then each prophetic month consists of thirty days:

1,260 days ÷ 42 months = 30 days per month

Likewise, if three and a half prophetic years equal 1,260 days, then each year itself is made up of 360 days:

1,260 days ÷ 3.5 years = 360 days per year

Therefore, Scripture itself establishes the use of 360-day years within Daniel's prophetic timetable. **Since the seventieth week belongs to the same seventy-week prophecy as the first sixty-nine weeks, consistency requires that the same measurement be applied throughout the prophecy.** For convenience, this 360-day measurement will be referred to as a "prophetic year." With that "key" unlocked, we can now perform the calculation.

Beginning Point: Nisan of 444 BC
Ending Point: Nisan 10 – March 30, 33 AD

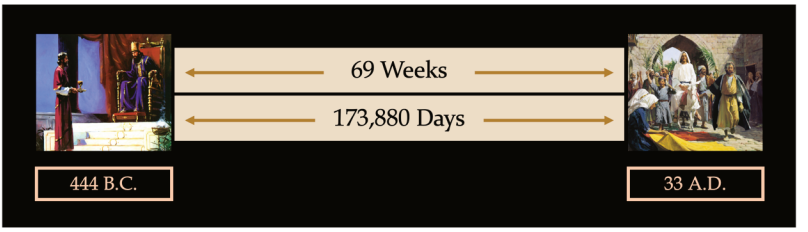
Gabriel told Daniel that sixty-nine weeks, or sixty-nine "sevens" of years, would extend from the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the appearance of "Messiah the Prince." Sixty-nine sevens equal 483 prophetic years:

69 × 7 = 483 years

If each prophetic year consists of 360 days, then:

483 years × 360 days = 173,880 days

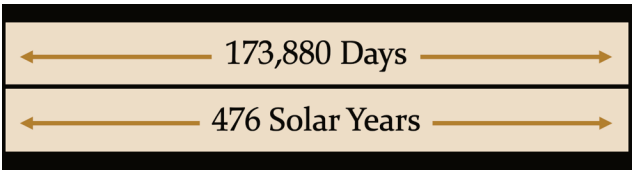
Thus, Daniel's sixty-nine weeks represent a total prophetic period of **173,880 days**.



The next step is to convert these 173,880 prophetic days into ordinary solar years so that the prophetic duration can be compared with

the historical interval between our beginning and ending points. Because the dates used in this study for the crucifixion of Christ and the Triumphal Entry are Julian Calendar dates, the Julian Calendar will also be used for this calculation. A Julian solar year contains 365.25 days. We can therefore convert the 173,880 days represented by Daniel's sixty-nine prophetic weeks into Julian solar years and determine whether that period corresponds with the interval between our proposed beginning and ending points.

173,880 "prophetic year" days is equal to 476.05749 Julian solar years.



In other words, Daniel's sixty-nine prophetic weeks are equivalent to approximately **476 solar years and 21 days**.

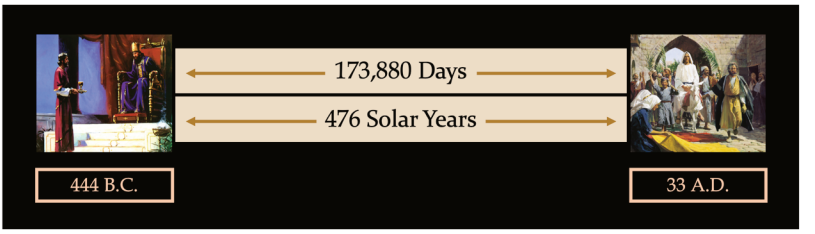
Note: The modern calendar in common use today is the Gregorian Calendar. Using a Gregorian solar year instead of a Julian solar year would produce only a negligible difference and would not affect the conclusion. Therefore, for simplicity and consistency with the dates used throughout this study, we will continue using the Julian Calendar.[4]

The small decimal remainder simply reflects the fact that 173,880 days converts to slightly more than 476 solar years – approximately 476 years and 21 days. This does not weaken the calculation. The prophecy itself gives the duration in years, or weeks of years, and as established earlier, Nehemiah identifies the beginning point only as sometime during the month of Nisan in 444 BC, without giving the exact day. We are therefore testing whether the prophetic period corresponds to the correct year and general time within that year, not

attempting to establish an exact day-to-day interval that the biblical text does not provide. At that level of precision, the additional 21 days present no difficulty at all.

What we *can* determine is whether the 173,880-day prophetic period corresponds with the historical interval between Nisan of 444 BC and Nisan of 33 AD. So, how many solar years separate these two years? Because there is no year zero between 1 BC and 1 AD,[5] the years must be calculated as follows:

444 + 33 - 1 = 476 solar years



Thus, the Daniel 9:25 prophecy turns out to be accurate down to the exact year – the 173,880 days of the sixty-nine prophetic weeks correspond to the 476-year span between the beginning and ending points!

Put simply, when Daniel's sixty-nine "sevens" of 360-day prophetic years (173,880 days) are converted into the terms of the solar calendar, they amount to 476 solar years. That allows us to compare the prophetic duration directly with the time between the beginning and ending points established throughout this study. **And the conclusion is incredible: from the decree of Artaxerxes in Nisan of 444 BC to the presentation of "Messiah the Prince" in Nisan of 33 AD, the span is exactly 476 calendar years! Daniel's prophetic timetable is exact to the very year of Jesus' presentation to Israel as the Messiah!**

With this conclusion in mind, consider again the words Jesus spoke as He entered Jerusalem:

> **41** And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, **42** Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least **in this thy day,** the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. … **44b because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.**
>
> -Luke 19:41-42, 44b

Against the chronological background of Daniel 9:25, the significance of Jesus' words is difficult to miss. Israel was held accountable for failing to recognize "this thy day" and "the time of thy visitation."

Gabriel's prophecy had been given to Daniel centuries beforehand. It established a defined period beginning with the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem and leading to the appearance of "Messiah the Prince." That command was issued in Nisan of 444 BC. The sixty-nine prophetic weeks amount to 476 solar years. And exactly 476 calendar years later, in Nisan of 33 AD, Jesus entered Jerusalem and publicly presented Himself to Israel as its messianic King. He arrived precisely in the year Daniel's prophecy pointed to!

This simply cannot reasonably be dismissed as coincidence. We are dealing with a prophecy written centuries before Christ that established a chronological timetable leading directly to the historical period in which Jesus presented Himself as the Messiah and was shortly afterward "cut off," exactly as Daniel's prophecy also had declared. The convergence of the biblical text, historical chronology, gospel accounts, and prophetic calculation is extraordinary.

For this reason, Daniel 9:25 stands as one of the most powerful apologetic evidences for the divine inspiration of Scripture and the messianic identity of Jesus Christ. Human beings cannot look centuries into the future and establish a chronological timetable leading to events that have not yet occurred. Yet that is precisely what this prophecy does. Its accuracy points beyond ordinary human foresight to a source outside the limitations of time itself.

At times throughout this study, it has been necessary to examine the historical, chronological, astronomical, and biblical evidence in considerable detail. But that detail was necessary in order to test every major part of the argument rather than simply assume the conclusion.

Now that the evidence has been brought together, the result is hard to overstate: **Daniel's prophetic timetable leads directly to the very year in which Jesus of Nazareth presented Himself to Israel as "Messiah the Prince."**

We also possess a unique advantage today. Through the accumulated knowledge of history, archaeology, chronology, and astronomy, we are able to examine certain biblical prophecies with resources unavailable to earlier generations. That privilege also brings an opportunity to understand these prophecies more fully and to use them as powerful evidence when presenting the truth of Scripture and the identity of Christ to others.

In sum, Daniel 9:25 is not simply an interesting prophetic curiosity. It is a remarkable demonstration of the prophetic nature of the Bible and a powerful witness that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah.

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CHAPTER 9

SOME UNLIKELY CONFIRMATIONS

A witness's testimony carries special weight when it runs against that witness's own interests or beliefs. When someone admits facts that work against the very position he is trying to defend, that testimony becomes especially difficult to dismiss. Remarkably, some of the most powerful confirmations of the conclusions reached in this study come from one of the least likely sources – Judaism itself.

Judaism obviously rejects the Christian claim that Jesus is Israel's Messiah. Yet Jewish Scripture, rabbinic writings, historical records, and traditions preserve an extraordinary body of evidence pointing to the conclusion that the Messiah had to appear within a particular historical window – the very period in which Jesus of Nazareth appeared. This is not simply a Christian claim imposed upon Jewish sources. Much of the evidence comes from the Jews' own Scriptures and traditional writings.

And the evidence does not stop with messianic chronology. Jewish sources also record a series of unusual Temple-related events beginning approximately forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple in 70 AD. Additional miraculous events preceding the destruction of Jerusalem were also recorded, not only in Jewish sources, but also by Christian and secular Roman historians. Viewed

together, these records provide a fascinating body of corroborating evidence surrounding the very period in which Christianity claims that Israel's Messiah had come and experienced rejection by the nation at large and its leaders.

We will examine this evidence from three different perspectives. First, we will consider rabbinic testimony concerning the expected time of Messiah's arrival. Second, we will examine several passages from the Jewish Scriptures themselves that require the Messiah to have appeared within a historical window that has already passed. Finally, we will examine the remarkable Temple traditions and historical reports of extraordinary signs surrounding the end of the Second Temple period.

Rabbinic Testimony

As detailed throughout this study, Daniel 9:24-27 contains a chronological prophecy leading to the appearance of the Messiah. It is also well established that the period surrounding the life of Jesus was marked by unusually intense messianic expectation among the Jewish people. Even the New Testament reflects this expectation through people such as Simeon and Anna, who were waiting for the promised redemption of Israel (Luke 2).

Modern scholarly Jewish sources agree. Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, in his extensive study of Jewish messianic expectation, described an extraordinary increase in messianic anticipation during the first century AD – precisely the period in which Jesus appeared:

> Prior to the first century (CE [or AD]) the messianic interest was not excessive ... The first century, however, especially the generation before the destruction [of the Second Temple] witnessed a remarkable outburst of messianic emotionalism. This is to be attributed, as we shall see, not to an intensification of Roman persecution, but to the prevalent belief **induced by the popular chronology of that day** that the age was on the threshold of the Millennium … when Jesus came into Galilee, "spreading the gospel of the kingdom of God" and saying

> the "time is fulfilled" and the "Kingdom of God is at hand," he was voicing the opinion universally held that … the age of the kingdom of God was at hand ... **it was this chronological fact which inflamed the messianic hope rather than the Roman persecutions.** … It seems likely, therefore, that in the minds of the people the Millennium was to begin around the year 30 CE. … The Messiah was expected around the second quarter of the first century CE because the Millennium was at hand. Prior to that time he was not expected, because according to the chronology of the day the Millennium was still considerably removed.[1]

Silver's research demonstrates that the extraordinary messianic expectation surrounding the time of Jesus was not simply the product of political oppression. Jewish chronology itself had created an expectation that the Messianic Age was approaching. Significantly, Silver places this expectation around the year 30 AD – almost precisely where the calculations examined throughout this study have led us.

Was Daniel's prophecy part of the reason for this chronological expectation? The evidence strongly suggests that it was. Jewish sources explicitly acknowledge that the book of Daniel contains information concerning the time of Messiah's arrival.

Jonathan ben Uzziel was a prominent Jewish rabbi who lived close to the time of Christ during the period of Roman-ruled Judea. He was one of the eighty rabbinic sages who studied under Hillel the Elder – arguably one of the most important figures in Jewish rabbinical history – and was regarded as Hillel's foremost student. Ben Uzziel is even mentioned several times in the Talmud, including Sukkah 28a, Bava Batra 133b, and Megillah 3a.[2] The Talmud also records that he produced an Aramaic translation of the Prophets. These credentials establish Ben Uzziel as a highly significant and authoritative witness within ancient Judaism, not an obscure or marginal rabbi.

In the Megillah 3a passage, the Talmud preserves an especially revealing tradition concerning his desire to translate the Writings – the third major division of the Hebrew Bible, which includes the book of Daniel:

> And Yonatan ben Uzziel also sought to reveal a translation of the Writings, but a Divine Voice emerged and said to him: It is enough for you that you translated the Prophets. The Gemara explains: What is the reason that he was denied permission to translate the Writings? **Because it has in it a revelation of the end, when the Messiah will arrive. The end is foretold in a cryptic manner in the book of Daniel, and were the book of Daniel translated, the end would become manifestly revealed to all.**[3]

Another translation renders the reason even more directly:

> Because the date of the Messiah is foretold in it.[4]

That admission is extremely important. Rabbinic tradition itself acknowledges that Daniel contains chronological information concerning the Messiah's arrival – information so revealing that, if Daniel were translated, "the end would become manifestly revealed to all." Yet the Talmud describes a supernatural voice intervening to prevent Ben Uzziel from translating the Writings for precisely that reason. This seems completely contrary to the purpose for which Daniel's prophecy was recorded in Scripture. God preserved the prophecy for His people to read and understand. Gabriel explicitly told Daniel to "consider the matter, and understand the vision" (Daniel 9:23), and then introduced the messianic chronology itself with the command, "Know therefore and understand" (Daniel 9:25).

This naturally raises a troubling question about the true origin of this so-called "divine voice." Why would a voice genuinely speaking for God seek to *prevent* His people from understanding something God Himself had commanded them to understand? More importantly, what agenda would be served by obscuring the appointed time of Israel's own Messiah – the central hope toward which Judaism points? Simply identifying the source as a "divine voice" does not establish that it actually came from God. If this tradition reflects a genuine supernatural intervention, the possibility must at least be considered that its source was deceptive and demonic – and that its purpose was to prevent Israel from recognizing the

time of Messiah's coming. The stated reason for the intervention makes that possibility especially difficult to ignore: without it, the messianic timetable contained in Daniel would become "manifestly revealed to all."

Note: Jewish sources frequently associate the coming of the Messiah with "the end." Judaism does not recognize the distinction between Christ's First and Second Comings revealed in the New Testament, and therefore tends to combine events Christians understand as belonging to two separate advents. This explains why many Jewish quotations concerning Daniel associate the Messiah with "the end," without recognizing that His First Advent has already occurred.

The significance of the Ben Uzziel tradition should not be underestimated. Here we have one of the most prominent figures in early rabbinic Judaism attempting to make the section of the Scriptures containing Daniel *more* accessible to readers, only to be *prevented* by a supernatural voice seeking to do the direct opposite because Daniel reveals the time of Messiah's arrival. This same theme of obfuscation regarding Daniel would continue in later Judaism.

Moses ben Nachman, commonly known as Nachmanides, was one of the most prominent Jewish scholars of the medieval period. Nachmanides developed his own prediction that the Messiah would arrive in 1358 AD, and although his calculation was obviously incorrect, the important point is that he based his prediction upon the book of Daniel.[5] Once again, the testimony comes from within Judaism itself: another highly respected Jewish scholar recognized that Daniel contained chronological information from which the time of Messiah's coming could be calculated.

Moses ben Maimon, commonly known as Maimonides, provides even stronger testimony. Maimonides was one of the most influential Torah scholars in Jewish history, and his *Mishneh Torah*, organized into fourteen books, became one of the great codifications of rabbinic law.[6] His testimony therefore cannot be dismissed as the opinion of an obscure or marginal Jewish interpreter. In his *Epistle to Yemen*,

Maimonides explicitly connected the writings of Daniel with the appearance of the Messiah:

> This, O our brethren, is one of the greatest pillars of the Israelite faith: that **there will surely rise a** [messianic] **leader** [qa'im] … **from all that Daniel** and Isaiah say and from all that the sages mentioned … **Daniel followed up** [what Isaiah stated] **with the appearance of the Messiah.**[7]

Notice once again what is being admitted. Maimonides recognized Daniel as a source of revelation concerning "the appearance of the Messiah." The connection between Daniel and the messianic advent was therefore not invented by Christians attempting to force Jesus into the passage. Some of Judaism's own most respected authorities understood Daniel in precisely this general way.

But Maimonides makes an even more revealing admission. He acknowledges that Daniel contains information concerning the *timing* of the messianic "End of Days," and then explains that the rabbis warned people *not* to calculate it:

> And Daniel has explained to us the great depth and mystery of the End of Days. And for this reason **the sages** (may their memory be a blessing) **warned against calculating the End of Days and reckoning the period of the coming of the Messiah, because it would cause the common fold to stumble and mislead them if that time arrived and he had not come** … [8]

Maimonides repeats the same rabbinic warning in his *Mishneh Torah,* even recording a death curse placed by the rabbis on those who would attempt the calculation:

> **One should not try to determine the appointed time for Mashiach's coming.** Our Sages declared: "May the spirits of those who attempt to determine the time of Mashiach's coming expire!"[9]

This is an extraordinary development and deserves much closer attention than it is often given. Daniel contains a chronology connected with Messiah. Rabbinic authorities acknowledged that Daniel contains calculable information concerning the timing of Messiah's appearance. Yet the people were then warned *not* to calculate Daniel's mention of the appointed timeline of His coming – and the warning was severe enough that rabbis pronounced a curse of death upon those who attempted it.

Maimonides himself tells us why. He says the sages discouraged such calculations because they feared that "if that time arrived and he had not come," the people might "stumble" and be "misled." The Talmud gives essentially the same explanation:

> Blasted be the bones of those who **calculate the end** (Messiah's advent). For they would say, **since the predetermined time has arrived, and yet he has not come,** he will never come.[10]

This explanation is incredibly revealing because it tells us exactly what the rabbis feared: **people performing the calculation and discovering that the predetermined messianic time had already arrived.** If the rabbis were confident that Daniel's chronology still pointed comfortably into the future, there would have been little reason to fear the calculation. The result would simply have reassured the people that Messiah's appointed time had not yet come and that they should continue waiting. Instead, the calculation *itself* was treated as dangerous enough to discourage – even with a rabbinic curse directed against those who attempted it.

The reason becomes obvious once the implications of an expired timetable are considered. If people calculated Daniel's chronology and concluded that the predetermined time *had* already arrived, yet Judaism had no recognized messianic figure who had fulfilled it, they would be confronted with two devastating possibilities: either Daniel's prophecy had failed, or the Messiah had already come and Israel had failed to recognize Him. If Daniel had failed, then one of the sacred prophetic books upon which Judaism rested would have been proven

false. But if Daniel had not failed, then the calculation would inevitably direct attention toward the most obvious candidate – Jesus of Nazareth, who had appeared precisely during the period in which Jewish chronological calculations based upon Daniel had led the people to expect the Messiah. Either conclusion would create an enormous theological crisis for rabbinic Judaism.

This gives the prohibition against calculating the end an even greater significance. The danger was not simply that people might become disappointed by an uncertain prediction about some distant future date. According to the Talmud's own explanation, the danger arose if people were to recognize that the predetermined time had already arrived, yet Judaism had no recognized messianic figure who had fulfilled it. Once that conclusion was reached, Jesus could no longer be dismissed as simply another failed claimant from the past. He had appeared at the very time Daniel's chronology pointed to, forcing the far more threatening possibility that the Messiah had already come and that Jesus was that Messiah.

The next Talmudic statement makes the problem even more pronounced:

> Rab said: **All the predestined dates (for redemption) have passed**, and the matter [now] depends only on repentance and good deeds.[11]

The importance of that statement cannot be overstated. In Jewish thought, "redemption" is directly associated with the coming of the Messiah, Israel's Redeemer.[12] [13] Rav (Abba Arikha) – rendered "Rab" in the translation quoted above – was a prominent third-century Jewish sage and one of the formative figures in rabbinic Judaism.[14] His statement is an explicit acknowledgment that the calculated timetable or "predestined" dates connected with redemption *had already passed*. Remarkably, Rav's statement therefore describes exactly the situation contemplated in the Talmudic warning against calculating the end: the predetermined time had arrived and passed without Judaism recognizing a Messiah who had fulfilled it.

But notice what follows this admission: "the matter [now]

depends only on repentance and good deeds." This represents a profound shift away from the intense chronological messianic expectation that had characterized Judaism around the time of Jesus. Once the anticipated dates had passed, redemption was projected indefinitely into the future and made dependent upon Israel's repentance and conduct rather than upon the prophetic timetable that had previously generated such intense expectation.

The destruction of the Temple in 70 AD accelerated this transformation. With the Temple and sacrificial system gone, rabbinic Judaism increasingly reorganized Jewish religious life around Torah study, prayer, repentance, and good works.[15] This historical development is highly significant, and Rav's statement captures that transition remarkably well. Judaism's fundamental transformation therefore lends further support to the argument of this study: the messianic timetable *had* elapsed, but *had not failed* – the Messiah had already come within the appointed period, and Judaism had failed to recognize Him.

The cumulative force of the rabbinic evidence is therefore persuasive. Judaism's own sources acknowledge that Daniel contains a messianic chronology, that the predetermined dates connected with messianic redemption had passed, and that the people were strongly discouraged from calculating them for themselves. The implications of the rabbis' severe warnings about what such calculations might reveal are difficult to ignore. In light of Jesus' appearance within precisely that historical window, these admissions lend considerable credibility to the interpretation of Daniel presented throughout this study. They also raise serious questions about why later Judaism fundamentally transformed and continued waiting after acknowledging an elapsed timeline rather than reconsidering whether the Messiah had already come.

Scriptural Testimony

The next category of evidence comes from an even more authoritative Jewish source – the Hebrew Scriptures themselves. Daniel 9 is not the

only prophecy that places chronological limits upon the Messiah's arrival. Several separate passages establish historical conditions that had to exist when He came, yet those conditions have long since disappeared. Four of these prophecies will now be examined.

The Daniel 9:25-26 Prophecy

The first is appropriately the central passage of this study. Daniel 9:25-26 not only provides the chronology for the Messiah's arrival, but also establishes an unmistakable historical boundary for His coming:

> **25** Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. **26** And **after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off,** but not for himself: **and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary**; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.
>
> -Daniel 9:25-26

Verse 25 places the arrival of Messiah at the conclusion of the sixty-nine weeks. Verse 26 then establishes the sequence that follows: Messiah is "cut off," and *afterward* the city and sanctuary are destroyed. The order could hardly be clearer. The Messiah appears as the concluding event of the sixty-ninth week, then the Messiah is cut off, and then Jerusalem and the Temple are destroyed. Therefore, whoever the Messiah is, His arrival and death had to *precede* the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple.



69 Weeks → Messiah Cut Off → City + Temple Destroyed

As discussed earlier, the Hebrew word translated "cut off" is *karath* (Strong's #H3772), meaning to "cut off, cut down," or "cut asunder," and it is frequently used in contexts involving death or destruction.[16] Interestingly, the same word is also used in connection with the "cutting" of a covenant, as illustrated in Genesis 15:9-18. Is there a more appropriate word to describe what happened to Christ? He was rejected by His people and put to death, yet through that very death the New Covenant was established. The Messiah would be "cut off" after the sixty-nine weeks had concluded – precisely what occurred shortly after Jesus presented Himself to Israel as its messianic King.

Returning to the chronology of the prophecy, the historical boundary established by verse 26 is decisive. In 70 AD, Roman forces under Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the Second Temple.[17] Daniel had stated that this destruction would follow the cutting off of Messiah. Therefore, if Daniel is speaking of the Messiah – as the rabbinic testimony already examined demonstrates that Jewish authorities themselves understood – then His arrival cannot still lie somewhere in the future. **He had to appear and be cut off before 70 AD.**

Remarkably, the Babylonian Talmud itself connects Daniel's seventy weeks with the destruction of the Second Temple. Tractate Nazir 32b records the following discussion:

> The Gemara responds: Although they might have known that the Second Temple would be destroyed, as the verse speaks of three Temples, did they know when it would be destroyed? Would they have considered that it might occur in their lifetimes, preventing them from sacrificing their offerings? Abaye said: And did they not know when? But isn't it written: "Seventy sevens are decreed upon your people and

> upon your sacred city" (Daniel 9:24), which indicates that the Second Temple would be destroyed seventy Sabbatical cycles of seven years after the destruction of the First Temple, which is 490 years.[18]

The important admission is unmistakable: the rabbis themselves connected Daniel's seventy weeks with the destruction of the Second Temple. Yet Daniel places Messiah's cutting off before the destruction of the city and sanctuary. This leaves an unavoidable dilemma for anyone who still places Messiah's first appearance in the future. Either Daniel's prophecy failed, or the Messiah appeared before 70 AD.

Jesus of Nazareth fits that required historical window precisely. He presented Himself publicly to Israel as its messianic King at the exact conclusion of the sixty-ninth week, was put to death only days later, and approximately forty years afterward Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed. The events therefore unfolded in exactly the order Daniel 9:25-26 required.

The Haggai 2:6-9 Prophecy

Daniel 9:25-26 is the clearest chronological passage requiring a pre-70 AD Messiah, but it is not the only one. Haggai 2:6-9 provides another remarkable indication that the Messiah had to appear while the Second Temple was still standing:

> **6** For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, **it is a little while**, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; **7** And I will shake all nations, and **the desire of all nations shall come:** and **I will fill this house with glory**, saith the Lord of hosts. **8** The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. **9** The **glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former**, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.
>
> -Haggai 2:6-9

The setting of this prophecy is important. Haggai was speaking

during the rebuilding of the Temple following the Babylonian captivity. The "former" house was Solomon's Temple, while "this latter" house was the Second Temple then being constructed. Yet God declared that the glory of this latter house would somehow become greater than the glory of the first, and this greater glory is connected in the passage with the coming of "the Desire of all Nations."

Jewish interpretation recognized the messianic significance of this expression. Rabbi Akiva – an enormously influential Jewish sage whom the *Jewish Encyclopedia* says "deserves to be called the father of rabbinical Judaism" – famously applied it to Simon Bar Kokhba, whom he mistakenly believed to be Israel's promised Messiah.[19] [20] Whatever Akiva's error concerning Bar Kokhba, his application demonstrates the underlying point: the expression was understood messianically.

That messianic understanding makes Haggai's next statement especially significant. Rabbinic Judaism itself acknowledges that the Second Temple lacked several manifestations of divine glory associated with Solomon's Temple,[21] while also preserving traditions of a continuing divine presence during the Second Temple period.[22] How, then, could Haggai declare that the glory of the latter house would surpass that of the former? The answer is contained within the prophecy itself. The greater glory would be connected with the coming of the "Desire of All Nations." The Messiah Himself would come to that Temple.

That requirement establishes another important historical boundary. The Second Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. If Haggai's prophecy concerns the Messiah, then He had to appear in that Temple *before* its destruction. Jesus of Nazareth uniquely fits that requirement. He entered the Second Temple repeatedly throughout His life and ministry and taught there publicly. Thus, the Second Temple, which had not experienced the same manifestations of divine glory associated with Solomon's Temple, received something even greater – the personal presence of the Messiah Himself.

This makes Jesus' own warnings concerning the Temple especially significant. As He approached Jerusalem shortly before His death, He foretold its coming destruction and explained that this judgment would come "because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation"

(Luke 19:44). He then declared concerning the Temple, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:38), and immediately afterward, as He departed from it, foretold its complete destruction, saying, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matthew 24:2). Haggai had promised that the glory of this latter "house" would surpass that of the former through the coming of the "Desire of All Nations."

Thus, Jesus not only appeared in that very house, but warned that Israel had failed to recognize the time of its visitation and that the Temple was therefore about to be left desolate and destroyed. When that destruction occurred in 70 AD, the historical opportunity for Haggai's prophecy to be fulfilled by any future Messiah disappeared with it.

The Genesis 49:10 Prophecy

A third prophecy establishes a different kind of historical limitation upon the Messiah's arrival. Shortly before his death, Jacob gathered his sons and announced that he would reveal what would befall their descendants "in the last days":

> And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days.
>
> -Genesis 49:1

When Jacob turned to Judah, he gave this remarkable prophecy:

> **The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come;** and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.
>
> -Genesis 49:10

The prophecy establishes a direct relationship between the continuing authority of the tribe of Judah and the coming of "Shiloh." Judah had been designated as Israel's royal tribe, the lineage through which

the nation's kingship would ultimately be established. The "sceptre" is therefore especially important to understand. A scepter was the rod carried by a ruler as a symbol of his authority to govern. In this context, it represents the governmental and judicial authority associated with Judah's royal line and its recognized right to rule and administer law. The parallel reference to a "lawgiver" reinforces the same idea. Jacob was therefore saying that the royal authority vested in Judah would not depart until the coming of Shiloh.

Who, then, is "Shiloh"? Jewish tradition has long recognized Shiloh as a title for the Messiah. The Babylonian Talmud states:

> R. Johanan said: For the sake of the Messiah. What is his [the Messiah's] name? – The School of R. Shila said: His name is Shiloh, for it is written, until Shiloh come.[23]

The ancient Jewish Targums make the connection even more explicit. Targums, or targumim, are ancient Jewish Aramaic translations and interpretive paraphrases of Scripture that frequently preserve traditional Jewish understandings of the biblical text. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan renders Genesis 49:10:

> Kings shall not cease, nor rulers, from the house of Jehuda [Judah], nor sapherim teaching the law from his seed, till the time that the King the Meshiha [Messiah], shall come,[24]

Targum Onkelos likewise states:

> He who exerciseth dominion shall not pass away from the house of Jehuda [Judah], nor the saphra from his children's children for ever, until the Meshiha [Messiah] come, whose is the kingdom, and unto whom shall be the obedience of the nations … [25]

The messianic meaning of Genesis 49:10 is therefore firmly established within Jewish tradition. Judah would retain its scepter – the governmental and judicial authority associated with its royal line –

until the coming of Messiah. This establishes another important historical boundary: **Shiloh had to come before Judah finally lost the authority represented by that scepter.**

Throughout the centuries, Judah had continued to exercise its own religious and judicial authority even while living under foreign domination. This continued through the Babylonian captivity, Persian rule, Greek rule, and into the early period of Roman control. But during the lifetime of Jesus, that situation changed dramatically. When Judea came under direct Roman administration and Coponius was appointed governor around 6/7 AD, Jewish sovereignty became increasingly subject to Roman authority.[26] [27] The governing and judicial powers historically exercised by Judah were now being subordinated to Rome.

By the early first century AD, Jewish judicial independence had already become significantly restricted under Roman rule. Josephus provides a revealing example of just how far that loss of authority had progressed. When the high priest Ananus convened the Sanhedrin and condemned James, the brother of Jesus, complaints were made because "it was not lawful for Ananus to assemble a sanhedrin without his [Roman] consent."[28] Even Israel's highest Jewish court could no longer exercise its authority independently of Rome. This incident occurred only a few decades after the life of Christ and provides further evidence that the loss of Judah's independent governing authority was taking place within the very first-century period in which Jesus had appeared.

Under the Mosaic Law, Israel had been given the responsibility to judge violations of God's law, including certain offenses that carried the death penalty. The authority to carry out those judgments was therefore an important part of Judah's God-given right to govern and administer the law – precisely the kind of authority represented by the "sceptre" in Genesis 49:10. The Talmud then provides a revealing example of just how far that judicial authority had been diminished. It states that about forty years before the destruction of the Second Temple – during the earthly ministry of Jesus – the Sanhedrin lost its power to judge cases involving the death penalty:

> **Forty years before the destruction of the Second Temple**, the Sanhedrin was exiled from the Chamber of Hewn Stone and sat in the store near the Temple Mount. … Once the Sanhedrin left the Chamber of Hewn Stone, **the court's power to judge capital cases was nullified**.[29]

Although Josephus's account and the Talmudic account place different stages of this loss of authority at somewhat different points, both locate that loss within the first-century period surrounding the life and ministry of Jesus.

The New Testament then provides an extraordinary illustration of this very reality. When the Jewish leaders brought Jesus before Pontius Pilate and demanded His execution, Pilate told them to judge Him according to their own law. Their response was an open admission that they no longer possessed the authority to carry out the death penalty:

> Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death:
>
> -John 18:31

The irony could hardly be greater. Genesis had declared, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come." Yet here the Jewish leaders stood before a Roman governor, openly acknowledging that they no longer possessed the authority to carry out a death sentence under their own law – while Shiloh Himself was standing directly before them! The very historical condition Genesis had connected with Messiah's arrival was unfolding before their eyes, and they didn't even recognize it.

A later tradition goes even further, recording Rabbi Rachmon as describing the Jewish leaders themselves lamenting this loss of authority and directly connecting it to Genesis 49:10. According to the account, when the members of the Sanhedrin recognized that the "scepter" had departed from Judah, they reacted with alarm because

the prophecy said this would occur in connection with the coming of Shiloh, the Messiah – yet in their minds, the Messiah had not come:

> Rabbi Rachmon says: "When the members of the Sanhedrim found themselves deprived of their right over life and death, a general consternation took possession of them; they covered their heads with ashes, and their bodies with sackcloth, exclaiming: 'Woe unto us, for the scepter has departed from Judah and the Messiah has not come!'"[30]

The chronological limitation established by Genesis 49:10 is therefore crucial: Judah would retain the scepter *until* Shiloh came. The evidence places the loss of that authority within the very period of Jesus' life and ministry. Josephus records the transition to direct Roman rule under Coponius around 6/7 AD, near the beginning of the first century and during the lifetime of Jesus, and his later account demonstrates how restricted Jewish judicial authority had become under that system. The Talmud places the loss of the Sanhedrin's power to judge capital cases at approximately 30 AD – during Jesus' ministry. The New Testament likewise records the Jewish leaders themselves acknowledging before Pilate that they could not lawfully put Jesus to death under their own authority.

Thus, the Rabbi Rachmon tradition captures the dilemma with remarkable clarity: the Jewish leaders are portrayed as recognizing that the scepter had departed and lamenting that the Messiah had not come. But what if He had? At the very time Judah was losing the authority Genesis 49:10 said would remain "until Shiloh come," Jesus of Nazareth was living and ministering among them. While Israel's leaders were explicitly acknowledging that they no longer possessed the sovereign authority to put Him to death, the man standing before them was the Messiah Himself. The scepter had departed from Judah, and Shiloh had come precisely when the prophecy required.

With the departure of Judah's scepter, the prophetic window had closed. Any Messiah who had not yet appeared would already be too

late, because Genesis 49:10 required Shiloh to come before that authority was gone.

The 1 Chronicles 17:10-14 Prophecy

The fourth and final prophecy narrows the required lineage of the Messiah even further. The Davidic Covenant, one of the central foundations of biblical messianic expectation, is recorded in both 2 Samuel 7:11-16 and 1 Chronicles 17:11-14. Although the promise has a near-term connection with David's son Solomon, its eternal dimensions extend beyond Solomon to the ultimate Son of David, the Messiah. The passage in 1 Chronicles states:

> **11** And it shall come to pass, when thy days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons; and I will establish his kingdom. **12** He shall build me an house, and I will stablish his throne for ever. **13** I will be his father, and he shall be my son: and I will not take my mercy away from him, as I took it from him that was before thee: **14** But I will settle **him** in mine **house** and in my **kingdom for ever:** and **his throne shall be established for evermore.**
>
> -1 Chronicles 17:11-14

The promise contains four closely related elements: an enduring house or dynasty, an everlasting kingdom, an everlasting throne, and a royal Son whose place in that kingdom would be established forever. The Messiah would therefore have to come not only from Israel and the tribe of Judah, but specifically from the royal line of David.

Jews for Judaism, a Jewish counter-missionary organization that specifically rejects the Christian claims concerning Jesus, nevertheless acknowledges that the Messiah "must be a member of the tribe of Judah" and "a direct male descendant of King David."[31] That admission is important because it demonstrates that this genealogical requirement itself is not in dispute.

This further narrows the messianic lineage established throughout

Scripture. The promised Savior would come through humanity from Adam, through Abraham, through Jacob, through the royal tribe of Judah, and finally through the house of David. By the Second Temple period, therefore, Davidic ancestry was one of the fundamental credentials by which the promised King was to be identified.

During the Second Temple period, Israel still possessed recognized institutions, records, and genealogical traditions through which ancestry could be investigated and publicly established. Josephus himself describes genealogical tables and ancestral records being maintained and transmitted to Jerusalem,[32] while Jewish sources show that issues of lineage were formally investigated within the Temple system.[33] The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD brought that nationally organized system of genealogical verification to an end.

Although claims of Davidic descent continued afterward, they became far more difficult to verify publicly. The Babylonian exilarchs, for example, were traditionally regarded as descendants of the house of David, yet the *Jewish Encyclopedia* acknowledges that they possessed no "authentic genealogical tree" establishing that connection.[34] The issue was therefore not whether Davidic descent could still be *claimed*, but whether it could still be *proven* with the same degree of public and institutional certainty that had existed before Jerusalem's destruction.

This makes the timing of Jesus' appearance especially significant. He came during the Second Temple period, while Israel's genealogical records, institutions, and traditions were still functioning. His Davidic ancestry was therefore not a claim first made centuries later, after those records had disappeared. It concerned a man living at the very time when such a claim could still have been investigated and challenged. The New Testament later preserves that ancestry in its genealogies, introducing Him as "Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1) and tracing His lineage through David. Jesus' claim to be the promised Son of David therefore arose within the very historical setting in which that royal qualification could still be examined and verified. This all ended in 70 AD, as

Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed and the national system through which Jewish ancestry had been investigated was lost.

Taken together, these four prophecies establish a remarkable series of historical requirements surrounding the coming of the Messiah. According to the scriptural testimony, the Messiah was to:

- Appear and be "cut off" before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD (Daniel 9:25-26).
- Come to the Second Temple before its destruction (Haggai 2:6-9).
- Come before the scepter departed from Judah – while the governmental and judicial authority associated with that tribe still remained (Genesis 49:10).
- Come from the royal line of David, a qualification that could still be investigated and proven within Israel's functioning genealogical system during the Second Temple period (1 Chronicles 17:11-14).

The cumulative force of these prophecies is difficult to ignore. Jesus appeared within the precise historical period in which all four conditions converged. He came before the destruction foretold in Daniel, entered the Second Temple foretold by Haggai, appeared as Judah's governing authority was passing away, and presented Himself as the Son of David while Israel still possessed the institutions and genealogical traditions through which that claim could be examined. Within approximately forty years of His death, Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed, and the historical world in which these prophecies had converged was forever gone.

Viewed together – and especially in light of the ancient Jewish interpretations already examined – these prophecies provide strong confirmation of the understanding of the Daniel 9:25 chronology presented throughout this study. Daniel, Haggai, Genesis, and 1 Chronicles each contribute a different identifying requirement, yet all converge upon the same historical period in which Jesus of Nazareth appeared.

But the evidence does not end with rabbinic and scriptural testimony. Jewish sources also preserve accounts of a series of extraordinary miraculous events associated with the Temple beginning approximately forty years before its destruction – around the very time of Jesus' death. Let's now examine those events and consider what they may reveal about the closing of the prophetic window for the Messiah's appearance.

Miraculous Testimony

Jewish tradition preserves a remarkable series of events associated with the Temple beginning approximately forty years before its destruction in 70 AD – around 30 AD. This places the beginning of these occurrences within the same general period as the ministry and death of Jesus Christ.

These accounts are especially significant because they come from Jewish rabbinic sources, not Christian ones. As we have already seen, this study has cited the Babylonian Talmud several times as a central source of rabbinic Jewish tradition. But rabbinic Judaism actually preserves *two* major Talmudic collections. The Babylonian Talmud was compiled among the long-established Jewish communities of Babylonia, whose presence there traced back to the Babylonian exile, while the Jerusalem Talmud was compiled in the land of Israel in the centuries following the destruction of the Temple. Both preserve extensive rabbinic discussions, interpretations, legal traditions, and historical memories. Remarkably, both also record the same unusual series of events associated with the Temple during its final forty years.

The Jerusalem Talmud states:

> Forty years before the destruction of the Temple, the western light went out, the crimson thread remained crimson, and the lot for the Lord always came up in the left hand. They would close the gates of the Temple by night and get up in the morning and find them wide open.[35]

The Babylonian Talmud records the same tradition:

> Our rabbis taught: During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot ["For the Lord"] did not come up in the right hand; nor did the crimson-colored strap become white; nor did the western most light shine; and the doors of the Hekel [the Holy Place in the Temple] would open by themselves.[36]

Thus, the two central sources of rabbinic Judaism preserve the same four extraordinary Temple signs, all beginning approximately forty years before the Temple was destroyed. That timing is what makes these traditions so important to our investigation. According to the chronology established in this study, Jesus was crucified in 33 AD – within the same general period in which these signs were said to have begun.

What changed at the Temple during those final forty years, and why? We will examine each of these four signs individually and consider whether their timing and meaning provide further confirmation that something of enormous spiritual significance had occurred – the Messiah had come, the sacrificial system had reached its fulfillment, and the prophetic window for His appearance had closed.

#1 – The Miracle of the Lot

The Jerusalem Talmud:
The lot for the Lord always came up in the left hand[37]

The Babylonian Talmud:
The lot ["For the Lord"] did not come up in the right hand [38]

The first of these signs concerns the casting of lots on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. According to Leviticus 16:7-10, two goats were presented before the Lord. Lots were then cast to determine the destiny of each goat: one would be designated "for the LORD" and offered as a sacrifice, while the other would be desig-

nated "for Azazel" and sent away into the wilderness as the scapegoat.

After the lots were cast, the high priest later confessed Israel's sins over the scapegoat, symbolically placing those sins upon it. The goat was then sent away into the wilderness, "bearing upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited" (Leviticus 16:21-22). In this way, it pictured Israel's sins being carried away from the people and removed from the camp.

By the Second Temple period, this selection was made using two small lots. One was inscribed "For the Lord" and the other "For Azazel." The lots were placed together in a small box and mixed so the high priest could not know which was which. He then reached in with both hands and randomly drew one lot in each hand, thereby determining which goat would receive each designation. The entire process was intentionally designed to produce a random result.[39]

Under normal circumstances, either lot could fall into either hand. Yet these Jewish sources record that during the final approximately forty years before the destruction of the Temple, the lot "For the Lord" *never once* appeared in the high priest's right hand. Year after year, beginning around 30 AD and continuing until the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, the same result occurred.

Consider how improbable that would be by chance alone. If the lot "For the Lord" had an equal fifty-fifty chance of appearing in either hand each year, the probability of it failing to appear in the right hand forty consecutive times would be approximately **one in 1.1 trillion**. At that level of improbability, chance ceases to be a reasonable explanation. Something that should naturally have varied from year to year instead produced the same result for roughly forty straight years – strongly indicating that the pattern was not random, but miraculous. In the rabbinic tradition preserved in the Jerusalem Talmud, this repeated result was regarded as an ominous sign, indicating that something had fundamentally changed in the Yom Kippur ritual.[40]

The timing is especially significant in the context of this study. Rabbinic tradition places the beginning of this pattern around 30 AD – only a few years before the 33 AD crucifixion date established earlier

in this study. And this was not an isolated occurrence. As we will now see, three other unusual Temple signs are said to have changed at about the same time.

#2 – The Miracle of the Red Cord

The Jerusalem Talmud:
The crimson thread remained crimson[41]

The Babylonian Talmud:
Nor did the crimson-colored strap become white[42]

The second sign also involved the Yom Kippur ceremony. Rabbinic tradition records that a strip of crimson wool was tied to the scapegoat, and other accounts describe a crimson strip placed at the entrance of the Temple where its color could be observed by all.[43] [44] When the scapegoat reached the wilderness and the ritual was completed, the crimson strip was said to miraculously turn white. The rabbis understood this change as a sign that Israel's sins had been atoned for and forgiven.[45]

But according to both Talmudic traditions, something changed during the final forty years before the destruction of the Temple – in a sense, a miracle in reverse. The crimson thread no longer turned white. Year after year, beginning around 30 AD, *it remained crimson* – and continued doing so until the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD.

The significance the rabbis attached to this color change is especially important. The Babylonian Talmud itself connects the crimson thread directly with Isaiah 1:18, where the cleansing of sin is pictured as scarlet becoming white:[46]

> Come, let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet [crimson], they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as [white] wool.
>
> -Isaiah 1:18

Although the Temple sacrifices continued outwardly for several more decades, the miraculous sign that had represented God's acceptance of Israel's atonement was no longer being given. From the Christian understanding, the reason is clear: the greater sacrifice to which that entire system pointed had already come. Once the Messiah had offered Himself as the final sacrifice for sin, there could be no expectation that God would continue to validate the former sacrificial system by "whitening" the crimson thread year after year. The reality had replaced the shadow. The New Covenant was now in place, and forgiveness was to be found through the Messiah's completed sacrifice rather than through the repeated sacrifices of Yom Kippur.

In that sense, the fact that the thread remained crimson is precisely what we should expect if Jesus truly accomplished what the New Testament claims. And once again, the timing provides remarkable confirmation of the Daniel 9:25 messianic countdown presented throughout this study.

#3 – The Miracle of the Temple Doors

The Jerusalem Talmud:
They would close the gates of the Temple by night and get up in the morning and find them wide open[47]

The Babylonian Talmud:
The doors of the Hekel [Temple] would open by themselves[48]

The third sign concerns a remarkable phenomenon involving the doors of the Temple opening by themselves. The Jerusalem Talmud refers generally to the gates of the Temple, while the Babylonian Talmud specifically identifies the doors of the Hekel, the Temple Sanctuary. According to these accounts, during the final forty years before the Temple's destruction, doors that had been closed at night would later be found to have opened by themselves. Once again, this places the beginning of the phenomenon around the early 30s AD – within the same remarkable historical period as the first two signs.

Josephus independently records another extraordinary example of this same Temple-door-opening phenomenon, this time involving the massive eastern gate of the inner court. He describes this gate as being made of brass, extremely heavy, secured by iron bolts set deeply into a solid stone foundation, and so difficult to close that it required twenty men.[49] Yet Josephus records that this enormous gate was seen to open by itself:

> Moreover, the eastern gate of the inner (court of the) temple, which was of brass, and vastly heavy, and had been with difficulty shut by twenty men, and rested upon a basis armed with iron, and had bolts fastened very deep into the firm floor, which was there made of one entire stone, was seen to be opened of its own accord about the sixth hour of the night.[50]

Josephus then records two very different reactions to the event. The common people regarded it as a favorable sign:

> This also appeared to the vulgar [commoners] to be a very happy prodigy [phenomenon], as if God did thereby open them the gate of happiness.[51]

But Josephus then says that "the men of learning" – the Jewish religious authorities and interpreters, essentially the rabbinical authorities of the period – understood the event very differently. Rather than viewing the opening gate as a favorable sign, they believed that "the security of their holy house was dissolved" and that the gate had been opened "for the advantage of their enemies." They publicly declared that the sign foreshadowed the coming desolation of the Temple.[52] The Jerusalem Talmud preserves essentially the same interpretation from Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, one of the leading Jewish religious authorities of the period:

> They would close the gates of the Temple by night and get up in the morning and find them wide open. Said Rabban Yohanan Ben Zakkai

> to the Temple, "O Temple, why do you frighten us? We know that you will end up destroyed. For it has been said, 'Open your doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour your cedars!'" (Zechariah 11:1).[53]

Thus, both Josephus and the Jerusalem Talmud preserve the same basic interpretation among the Jewish religious leaders: the inexplicable opening of the Temple doors was understood as a warning that judgment upon the Temple was approaching.

From the Christian perspective, however, there appears to be another remarkable dimension to the symbolism. While the learned Jewish authorities correctly understood the opening doors as a warning that the Temple was approaching its destruction, the common people may also have perceived something significant when they interpreted the event as though God had "opened them the gate of happiness." In a profound sense, both interpretations fit what was actually taking place. The old Temple order was approaching its judgment and end, while through the Messiah a new and greater way into God's presence was being opened. This becomes even more significant when placed alongside another extraordinary event involving the Temple at the death of Jesus.

Under the Old Covenant, the veil separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple. Only the high priest was permitted to pass beyond it, once each year on the Day of Atonement, to enter into God's presence on behalf of Israel (Hebrews 9:7). Ancient Jewish tradition describes this veil as forty cubits high, twenty cubits wide, about four inches thick, and so massive that three hundred priests were said to participate when it was immersed for cleansing.[54] Whatever degree of literal precision was intended by that description, the point is clear – the veil represented an *immense* barrier between the people and the innermost sanctuary.

Yet at the very moment Jesus died, Matthew records:

> **50** Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. **51** And, behold, **the veil of the temple was rent in twain**

> [ripped in two] **from the top to the bottom**; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;
>
> -Matthew 27:50-51

From the Christian understanding, the symbolism is powerful. The tearing of the veil from top to bottom signified that through the Messiah's completed sacrifice, the barrier separating man from the presence of God had been removed. Hebrews 10:19-20 explains the significance explicitly, showing how through Christ, the true way into God's presence had now been opened:

> **19** Having therefore, brethren, **boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus**, **20** By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, **through the veil**, that is to say, his flesh;
>
> -Hebrews 10:19-20

In light of this, the two Jewish interpretations of the opening doors fit together remarkably well. The religious authorities saw a warning that the Temple was about to be judged and destroyed, while the common people saw a sign that God was opening a doorway for them. From the Christian perspective, both were happening at once. The old Temple system was approaching its divinely foretold end, while the Messiah's sacrifice opened a new and greater way for all to enter God's presence.

The Temple continued functioning outwardly for several more decades, but its destruction was coming – exactly as Jesus had warned and exactly as Daniel 9:26 required after the Messiah had been "cut off." Once again, the timing provides an astonishing confirmation of the chronology presented throughout this study.

#4 – The Miracle of the Temple Menorah

The Jerusalem Talmud:
The western light went out[55]

The Babylonian Talmud: Nor did the western most light shine[56]

The fourth sign concerns the westernmost lamp of the Temple Menorah. Like the red cord, this was in a sense another miracle in reverse – something extraordinary that had regularly occurred in the past suddenly stopped occurring. According to the Talmud, the westernmost lamp was given the same amount of oil as the other lamps, yet it would consistently continue burning after the others had gone out, allowing the other lamps to be relit from its flame. Most importantly, the rabbis themselves regarded this recurring phenomenon as a testimony that the Divine Presence rested among Israel.[57]

This makes what happened around the early 30s AD especially significant. According to both Talmudic accounts, during the final forty years before the Temple's destruction, the westernmost lamp no longer continued to shine. In other words, at approximately the same time that the lot stopped falling in the favorable hand, the crimson thread stopped turning white, and the Temple doors began opening by themselves, the lamp that Jewish tradition associated with the continuing presence of God also stopped its miraculous burning.

Something had changed. Israel's Messiah had come, had been rejected, and had given His life as the final sacrifice for sin. The Temple system that pointed forward to Him had reached its fulfillment, and a miraculous sign that the rabbis themselves associated with God's continuing Presence among Israel now began to suggest the opposite. The timing also fits directly with Jesus' own warnings about what was soon to befall Jerusalem. As He was being led away to be crucified, Jesus told the women of Jerusalem:

> **28** But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. **29** For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. **30** Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and

to the hills, Cover us. **31** For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

-Luke 23:28-31

So, the destruction of Jerusalem should not have come as a surprise to anyone familiar with the words of Christ. Thus, this miracle of the Menorah acts as a fourth miraculous indicator that the former times and symbols had been fulfilled in the arrival of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Further Miracles

The four miracles discussed so far are incredible, but the record of strange and supernatural occurrences does not end there. The First Jewish Revolt began in 66 AD, only a few years before the final destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD.[58] During this same period, a number of additional extraordinary events were recorded by historians from Roman, Jewish, and Christian backgrounds.

On Nisan 8 of 66 AD, about a week before Passover, an extremely brilliant light appeared around the altar and the inner Temple at approximately 3:00 AM. According to Josephus, for about thirty minutes the area was illuminated as though it were daytime before the light departed.[59] Ancient Jewish tradition likewise records that the Shekinah departed and remained upon the Mount of Olives for three and a half years while calling Israel to repentance.[60] Ernest Martin connects this tradition with the events surrounding the destruction of the Second Temple:

> There is also another reason why Christians in the first century were very interested in the Mount of Olives. This is because it was believed that the Shekinah Glory of God which supposedly dwelt inside the Holy of Holies at the Temple left the sanctuary and went to the Mount of Olives and hovered over that spot at the time of the Roman/Jewish War which ended in A.D. 70. The fact that the Shekinah Glory left the old Temple and migrated to the top of the Mount of Olives was an

important event to Eusebius (Church historian and scholar, 260?-340? A.D.).[61]

Other extraordinary signs followed. A few days later, before sunset, chariots of fire and troops of armed soldiers were reportedly seen moving through the sky around the city. Josephus himself acknowledged how incredible the account sounded, yet stated that it had been witnessed by many. Then, at the feast of Pentecost, priests entering the inner court of the Temple felt a tremendous shaking and heard what sounded like the voice of a great multitude saying, "Let's leave here."[62] [63] [64]

These extraordinary events were preserved in multiple ancient sources, including Josephus, Tacitus, and Eusebius, demonstrating that these reports of supernatural phenomena surrounding Jerusalem and the Temple were widely known. Collectively, these accounts present a compelling picture of the glory and presence of God departing from the Temple shortly before its destruction. Even Josephus described God as having turned away from His sanctuary,[65] the Temple as no longer being a dwelling place fit for Him,[66] and the Divine Presence as having departed from it altogether.[67]

Amazingly, this same pattern had occurred once before. Centuries earlier, immediately before the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians, the prophet Ezekiel saw the Shekinah glory of God depart from the Temple. The glory moved eastward and ultimately stood upon the mountain east of Jerusalem – the Mount of Olives (Ezekiel 10:18-19; 11:22-23). The pattern is hard to overlook. Before the First Temple was destroyed, God's glory departed from the Temple and moved eastward to the Mount of Olives. Then, before the destruction of the Second Temple, the Divine Presence was again understood to have departed from the Temple and moved to the same mountain.

The New Testament book of Hebrews provides the theological framework for understanding these events. Written while the Temple was still standing, Hebrews explains that the earthly sanctuary and its rituals belonged to the Old Covenant order and pointed forward to the greater reality accomplished through Christ (Hebrews 8-10). Through

His sacrifice, the New Covenant had been established, and the Temple system belonging to the Old Covenant had become obsolete (Hebrews 8:13).

What gives these events their greatest significance is not simply *that* they occurred, but *when* they occurred. The unusual Temple signs began right around the time of Jesus' death, while the later signs reported in the years leading up to Jerusalem's destruction depicted the Divine Presence departing from the Temple. Then, in 70 AD, the Temple itself was destroyed and its sacrificial system came to an end. The sequence therefore provides another remarkable confirmation that the Messiah had already come within Daniel's appointed timetable before the city and sanctuary were destroyed.

Conclusion

By the end of this investigation, a remarkably consistent historical picture has emerged from sources that would hardly be expected to support the Christian claim. Rabbinic writings preserve the belief that Daniel contained a calculable chronology connected with the Messiah and even acknowledge that the appointed dates for redemption had passed. The Hebrew Scriptures establish separate historical conditions that required the Messiah to appear while the Second Temple was still standing. Finally, both Talmudic traditions preserve a sequence of extraordinary signs beginning around the time of Jesus' death and continuing toward Jerusalem's destruction, reinforcing the conclusion that Israel's messianic turning point had already occurred.

These lines of evidence arise from different sources and address different questions, yet they converge upon the same period of history. Jewish messianic expectation had reached an extraordinary height in the early first century, the scriptural conditions surrounding the Messiah's appearance were still in place, and Jesus of Nazareth appeared precisely within that window. Then, within a generation, Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed, the sacrificial system ended, and those historical conditions disappeared forever along with them.

Judaism therefore becomes an unlikely witness to the very conclusion it rejects. Its own writings, traditions, and historical memory preserve evidence that the appointed time for Messiah's appearance belonged to the first-century world *before* Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed. These independent lines of testimony all point back to the same historical period and further strengthen the case that Daniel 9:25 found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

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CHAPTER 10

OUR FINAL CONCLUSION

This study began with a straightforward question: Did Daniel really provide a prophetic timeline for the arrival of Israel's Messiah, and if so, where does that timeline lead?

We first established that the Book of Daniel existed long before the events described in Daniel 9:25 and that its text has been reliably preserved. We then identified the historical beginning and ending points of the sixty-nine-week prophecy, examined the chronology surrounding each, and tested the calculation itself. Finally, we considered several additional lines of evidence that independently confirmed the same conclusion. The result has remained remarkably consistent throughout: Daniel's prophetic countdown leads directly to the first-century appearance of Jesus Christ.

What makes Daniel's prophecy so compelling is its astonishing specificity and precision. We are not dealing with a vague prediction that could be applied to almost anyone in any period of history, but with a measurable chronology given centuries in advance, beginning with an identifiable historical event and ending with the arrival of "Messiah the Prince." When that chronology is followed through history, it leads directly to the first-century period in which Jesus of Nazareth appeared and presented Himself to Israel as that Messiah.

From this study, two clear facts emerge that demand a response from every reader:

#1 – The inescapable conclusion is that the Bible is a book that provably finds its origin outside the domain of time. Only a Being outside of physical reality and beyond the limitations of time could predict future events with such incredible accuracy. Only such a Being could be the true source and Author behind this prophecy.

#2 – It is equally inescapable that Jesus Christ fulfilled the prophecy of Daniel 9:25, confirming His identity as the Messiah, God come in the flesh. Centuries before His birth, Scripture gave a remarkably specific prophetic timetable for the Messiah's arrival, and Jesus fulfilled it with astonishing precision. The accuracy of that prophecy points to God as its true Author, while its fulfillment in Christ powerfully confirms the New Testament testimony that He is the promised Messiah.

These two facts are inseparably connected. If Daniel accurately foretold the time of Messiah's arrival centuries before it occurred, then the prophecy cannot reasonably be explained as the product of man. And if Jesus Christ appeared at the appointed time and fulfilled what Daniel foretold, then His identity cannot simply be dismissed as a matter of religious opinion. The prophecy itself provides objective evidence that demands that His claims be taken seriously.

The importance of these conclusions extends beyond simply identifying Jesus correctly within history. The New Testament presents Him as the promised Messiah who died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The same Messiah whose arrival was foretold in Daniel is the One through whom God now offers forgiveness, reconciliation, and eternal life.

The question, then, is no longer simply whether Daniel's prophecy can be calculated or whether Jesus appeared at the appointed time. That evidence has been laid out and is conclusive. The greater question is what we will do with that knowledge. If Jesus Christ truly is the Messiah whom God foretold centuries in advance, then His words,

His claims, and His call to salvation demand a response from each of us.

I pray that you will respond by placing your faith in Him and receiving the salvation He came to provide. May God bless you in Jesus' name.

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