

male and female are represented in other imagery.

There is one difference between the standing stones found in many places in the desert and the ones found in cultivated areas; the former are generally just unhewn stones, whilst the latter are often shaped. In the Biblical examples of where stones were set up for good purposes there is no indication that the stones were ever shaped first. Moreover, most of the standing stones in the desert are regarded as being of considerable antiquity, and it appears that they were commonly set up by nomadic peoples in such areas in ancient times. Apparently God did not regard the practice as wrong initially, and so the faithful set them up from time to time for legitimate purposes. It was the setting up of shaped and

carved stones intended to represent false deities that was wrong, and caused the practice to be abandoned by the Israelites even for good purposes, lest it led to idolatry.

Not many examples of standing stones have been found in the cultivated area of Israel. This is not surprising, for the Israelites would have destroyed many such sites when they conquered the land, in accordance with the command of Exodus 23:24; and in the days of the kings of Judah there were occasions of religious reform, when standing stones were overthrown and broken up. Such occurred in the reigns of Asa (2 Chron. 14:3), Hezekiah (31:1) and Josiah (2 Kgs. 23:14), with the reform in Hezekiah's reign apparently extending into the territory of the northern kingdom of Israel.

A fresh look at the Seventy Weeks Prophecy (1)

The late David Sutcliffe (Ashby)

Over the past couple of years I have received two articles putting forward different understandings, in some respects at least, of the Seventy Weeks Prophecy of Daniel 9. They both attempt to address certain problems that the authors perceive in the more traditional understanding of the prophecy. God willing they will be published in successive months under the title, "A fresh look at the Seventy Weeks Prophecy". Comments are welcome, but correspondence will not be published until both articles have appeared—*T.B.*

"THUS SAITH the LORD, That 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. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon Me, and ye shall go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart. And I will be

found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive" (Jer. 29:10-14).

These words of Jeremiah had exercised the mind of Daniel, as recorded in Daniel 9:2. Jeremiah was telling the captives in Babylon not to get restless, because God had ordained that the captivity was to last for seventy years. Earlier in Jeremiah (25:12) Daniel would have read of the seventy-year period after which the Babylonians were to be punished for their iniquity. But surely, as Daniel studied the writings of Jeremiah, he would have seen that his words looked beyond the return of the captives from Babylon to the time when God would "make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah", and would "forgive their iniquity, and . . . remember their sin no more" (31:31,34). His mind would have been taken to the restoration of the Kingdom of God on earth. The visions and the prophecies that he had interpreted or received over the years concerned this time, when the kingdoms of this earth would become the Kingdom of God.

Daniel had seen the overthrow of the Babylonians by the Medes and Persians under King Darius. From the approximate dates available, it would appear that Daniel had been in Babylon for over sixty-eight years at this time, and his desire to see the restoration of his city of Jerusalem would have been heightened by the feeling of anticipation that would come as the day for the fulfilment of God's prophecy through Jeremiah approached.

Daniel's prayer

Many years later, Peter, writing in his Second Epistle, speaks of the "day of the Lord", and asks: "what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness . . . ?" (3:10,11). Daniel provides us with the answer in some measure. He shows that, as the day comes closer, rather than saying that the race is nearly over, and then slowing down, we must become more active in prayer and supplication.

In fact, the prayer in Daniel 9 is one of the most powerful in the Old Testament. In verse 3 it is recorded that he prepared himself with fasting and clothed himself in sackcloth and ashes. In verse 5 he confesses the greatness of the rebellion of the children of Israel from God, and his own sins, associating himself with his people: "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled". In verse 19 he calls on God: "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for Thine own sake, O my God: for Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name". We get a tremendous exhortation from this prayer, which followed the understanding by Daniel of the prophecy of Jeremiah. We are sure from the words of the prophets that we are living in the last days, and surely we ought to be praying with the urgency of Daniel.

At this stage the prayer was interrupted by God sending "the man Gabriel" to give him the message, which emphasises the importance of the revelation to come. We learn from chapter 8 that Daniel had been "sick certain days" following the previous revelation, which had told him that it would be "many days" before the accomplishment of God's purpose with the Jews (vv. 26,27).

The prophecy in chapter 9 was to give Daniel, the one "greatly beloved" of God, skill and understanding. He was asked to "understand the matter, and consider the vision" (v. 23). Let us now try and do just that.

"Seventy weeks are determined"

The first thing to note is that the prophecy was given in the first year of Darius the Mede. This date is approximately 539 B.C. This prophecy has been one of the most tantalising as regards interpretation, because, on the face of it, it seems so obvious, but once you start looking at the fine detail all sorts of problems arise. Verses 24,25 read:

"Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, 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. 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".

From this we learn that the prophecy is fairly and squarely concerned with the people of Daniel and with his holy city, which is Jerusalem. So it is a prophecy of the Jews and their land. We are told that seventy weeks are determined on Daniel's people for the completion of a number of events. How are we to interpret these weeks, or 'sevens'?

In 10:2 we have Daniel mourning for three full weeks. This is correctly translated, as we would understand it, as a week of seven days. So if Daniel in chapter 9 was referring to weeks of seven days, it is reasonable to expect that he would have used the same word as in chapter 10, but he did not.

The thoughts of Daniel would have been concerned with the seventy-year captivity, and the reason for this. Being a Hebrew, he would have known the concept of the seventh year as a year of rest, and we have recorded for us in 2 Chronicles 36:21 the idea that the length of captivity in Babylon was to allow the land to enjoy her sabbaths. The Hebrews had violated the sabbath law for 490 years, and as a result they were subjected to seventy years captivity. Daniel would have understood Gabriel to be saying that a number of these sabbatical sevens of years were decreed upon his people.

For simplicity at this stage we shall follow the AV. We have here seventy of these sevens, which equals 490 years. But what sort of years are they? One of the more popular concepts is that they

were years of 360 days, as this fits in with the Jewish year and with the 1,260 days, or forty-two months, given in other prophecies. However, if we are looking at Jewish sabbatical periods of years, then there would be seven years including the intercalary months to enable seed time and harvest to occur at the correct times. So I suggest that we are dealing with seven years as we know them. This is the time period decreed for Daniel's people and his city.

But what is to happen during this time-period? Daniel, we know, had been praying to God regarding the end of the captivity of the Jewish people in Babylon. But the reply of God does not refer to the seventy-year captivity; it speaks of a period of time for the accomplishment of certain matters relative to God's people. Daniel is looking for release from captivity by the Babylonians, but God tells him of a much greater release from captivity that is in store for his people. It is the release from the bondage of sin and death.

The six items

In verse 24 we have six things referred to. When looking at these, we have to remember that the prophecy is Jewish from beginning to end; the Gentiles are not even referred to indirectly.

The first point referred to is, "to finish the transgression". This means the end of Israel's transgression against the law and commandments of God. The transgressions of Israel will be finished when Christ returns to rule on David's throne.

The next point is, "to make an end of sins". The end of sins is when sinners accept that Christ is the one who died for our sins, but, as mentioned here by Gabriel, it means the sins of Israel. Israel as a nation have not to this time accepted Christ as the promised Messiah; therefore they continue in sin. The end of sins will be accomplished when Christ returns: "And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins" (Rom. 11:26,27).

The third point is, "to make reconciliation for iniquity". A Jew can be saved today, like any Gentile, by accepting Christ as Saviour. But the salvation of Israel referred to here is the saving of the entire nation. This will occur when the Jews are prepared to say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Mt. 23:39).

Point four is, "to bring in everlasting righteousness". No man, including the Jew, has any righteousness of his own. The only righteousness that man can attain is that righteousness which is by faith in Christ, and this is imputed righteousness. Righteousness will prevail in Israel when Jesus is believed in as the Messiah. This is declared by Jeremiah: "In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:6).

Point five is, "to seal up the vision and prophecy". Daniel was commanded to seal up the book of his prophecy until the end. This will be fulfilled at the time of Christ's return, when the gift of prophecy and vision will again be sealed up in God's covenant people.

Lastly there is, "to anoint the most Holy". This means the sanctification of the temple with the presence of Messiah, and this will not occur until the Lord comes to his temple, when the glory of the Lord will fill the house.

All these six points will only be fulfilled when Israel receives the Messiah. Messiah will come to Israel at the end of the weeks determined.

What was the original text?

In Daniel 9:25 we read: "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". In verse 23 we are told that the commandment came forth at the beginning of Daniel's supplications; we know the date was 539 B.C. If we go forward 490 years we reach a time of approximately 50 B.C. This date is clearly short of the date of the birth of Christ, and because of this much effort has been expended in determining the date of the commandment, and much use has been made of different types of year, so that with much juggling of starting points and years the date of the birth of Christ can be reached.

In connection with the fixing of the date of the commandment, Ezra 6:14 is quoted: "And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment [RV, decree] of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia". Here are the commandments of God and the decrees of the kings. But surely the commandment to restore must be that of God referred to in Daniel 9:23, which took place in the first year of Darius the Mede, that is, in 539 B.C.

Where does all this leave us? We know that the prophecy must have been capable of indicating the time of the birth of Jesus, because there were those looking for it at the right time. Also, there were the wise men from the east; why were they attracted by the star, unless they had some prophecy to go on?

There is a possibility, and it is quite a strong one, that we are trying to understand a text that is not fully satisfactory. The present translation has been arrived at taking into account the Hebrew pointing and punctuation, which is a rabbinical commentary. These rabbis would have had a vested interest in anything rather than the fulfilment of this prophecy at the time of Jesus. A little alteration of the pointing could make the prophecy refer to the death of a fairly unknown priest Onias, thus preventing the recognition of Jesus as the fulfilment.

What, then, of the Septuagint Version, which was translated into Greek well before the time of Christ? The version that we have is in fact a translation attributed to Theodotion, who discarded what is considered to be the original text of Daniel and used one based on current Hebrew manuscripts that had been pointed and punctuated by the Jews of the first century. The original Septuagint would have been based on the unpointed Hebrew. Only one Greek manuscript, the Codex Chigianus, was known that was thought to be the original; however, the Chester Beatty papyrus found in 1931 confirmed the Chigianus text and not that of Theodotion. It is known that Origen accused the Jews of having expunged certain parts of Daniel; but, for some reason best known to himself, he adopted the Theodotion translation of the expunged texts in preference to the original Septuagint. It is not easy to obtain access to the Codex Chigianus, and I have had to rely on translations by a somewhat biased individual.

How many weeks?

Let us look first at the punctuation. In the AV there is a comma after "seven weeks" in verse 25, and a colon after "threescore and two weeks". But the RV places the colon after "seven weeks" and the comma after "threescore and two weeks", thus dissociating the "seven weeks" from the "threescore and two weeks". This is sensible, because it has always been difficult to arrive at a reason for this giving of seven weeks and sixty-two weeks, rather than lumping them together.

But let us take a further look at verse 24. The words translated "seventy weeks" are literally "weeks, weeks" in the Hebrew, which is a Hebrew way of saying "by weeks". So verse 24 could read, "By weeks it is decreed upon thy people and thy holy city". Having introduced the topic of weeks, the angel goes on to show what weeks are decreed. In the original Hebrew we have the word which, depending upon the pointing, may be translated "week", "seven" or "seventy". This word is used three times in verse 25. In the AV it is translated "*seven weeks*, and threescore and two *weeks*", but the Hebrew could be equally translated "weeks seven and seventy: threescore and two". Thus verse 25 could read, "From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto Messiah the Prince shall be weeks seven and seventy: threescore and two shall it be built again with the street and moat, even in troublous times". Then verse 26 follows: "after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off".

If we accept this approach, we take these seventy-seven weeks as 539 years; and if we begin these weeks from the commandment of God which went forth in the days of Darius the Mede in 539 B.C., we come to year zero, the conventional date of the birth of Jesus.

In the assumption that the end of the sixty-two weeks also refers to the birth of Jesus, we can see that this period goes back to the date 434 B.C., which is the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes referred to in Nehemiah 5:14, and we are told in Nehemiah 6:1 that Nehemiah "had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein". Thus, if we accept this change in pointing and punctuation, a change which is in fact supported by the old Septuagint version Codex Chigianus, where we have the reading "seven and seventy weeks", we obtain a great simplification of the problem.

The prophecy tells us that the Messiah the Prince will come to Israel after seventy-seven weeks of years, and in verse 26 it tells us that Messiah will be cut off, not for himself but for the salvation of mankind. The verse continues to speak of the destruction of the city and sanctuary, something that was carried out by the Roman power in A.D. 70.

The final week

But, as we have said earlier, the fulfilment of the six points in verse 24 takes us through to the time when the Jews will have repented and the

kingdom has been restored to Israel. So what of verse 27? If we accept the seventy weeks of the AV, we have to accept that this must occur within these seventy weeks. It has to be that the sixty-nine weeks takes us to the Messiah, and his death would occur in the middle of the seventieth week, an event which brought an end to the sacrificial offerings of the Jews. The desolation of the land by the Romans followed. It has been suggested that the remainder of this last week (3½ years) was the time leading up to the death of Stephen and to the conversion of the first Christian, Cornelius. But neither of these events brings us to the time of the Kingdom.

If, however, we accept the seventy-seven weeks to Messiah and the sixty-two weeks from the rebuilding of the city to Messiah, then this final week can be taken separately from the other weeks, and treated as a further week. Verse 27 says, "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, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate".

The key to this prophecy is in the interpretation of the "he" who is going to confirm the covenant with "many" in Israel for one week.

Most commentators associate the "he" with the "prince" of verse 26, and because the prince was of the Roman Empire, suggest that "he" will also be a prince of the Roman Empire. In chapter 8 there is the little horn that waxed great, even to the host of heaven. This horn came out of one of the four horns of the Grecian goat, which in turn became the eastern wing of the Roman Empire. Thus the power that "shall . . . stand up against the Prince of princes" (v. 25) will come from the Eastern Roman Empire, which of course included all the nations of the Middle East. Thus an Arab leader would not be excluded from this prophecy, and we know that the Biblical conflict that has to be resolved is between the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac.

Perhaps the final, additional, week of 9:27 refers to a seven-year peace agreement which will be broken by the Arabs halfway through, leading to a period of downtreading of the Jews by the Arabs (referred to by Christ in Matthew 24:15,21) and the return of Christ.

Editor's note

This article was originally an address given by the late Brother Sutcliffe in the summer of 1996. The concluding sentence replaces the concluding part of the original address, which referred in some detail to events then current in the Middle East.—T.B.

The 'seventy-year captivity'

Robert Scott Thomson

IT IS CUSTOMARY to refer to the 'seventy years of the Babylonian captivity of the Jews'. However, calculations based on the various deportations of the Jews from Judah in relation to the end of the Babylonian Empire produce periods that are all less than seventy years, as Table 1 opposite shows. This requires an investigation into the accuracy of the 'seventy years captivity' concept.

A seventy-year period, associated with the prophecies of Jeremiah, is indeed referred to several times in the Scriptures in connection with the captivity in Babylon. A closer look at the context and specific wording of these passages is necessary to identify the periods being referred to, and to meet claims that there are discrepancies and contradictions in Scripture.

Daniel 9

"In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; in the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem" (Dan. 9:1,2).

Thus did Daniel state the results of his study and contemplation, probably of Jeremiah 25:12, in which the figure of seventy years explicitly appears. It is heartening for those who today are searching the prophetic word to note that Daniel's understanding in this instance did not come from direct Divine revelation but from his own research.