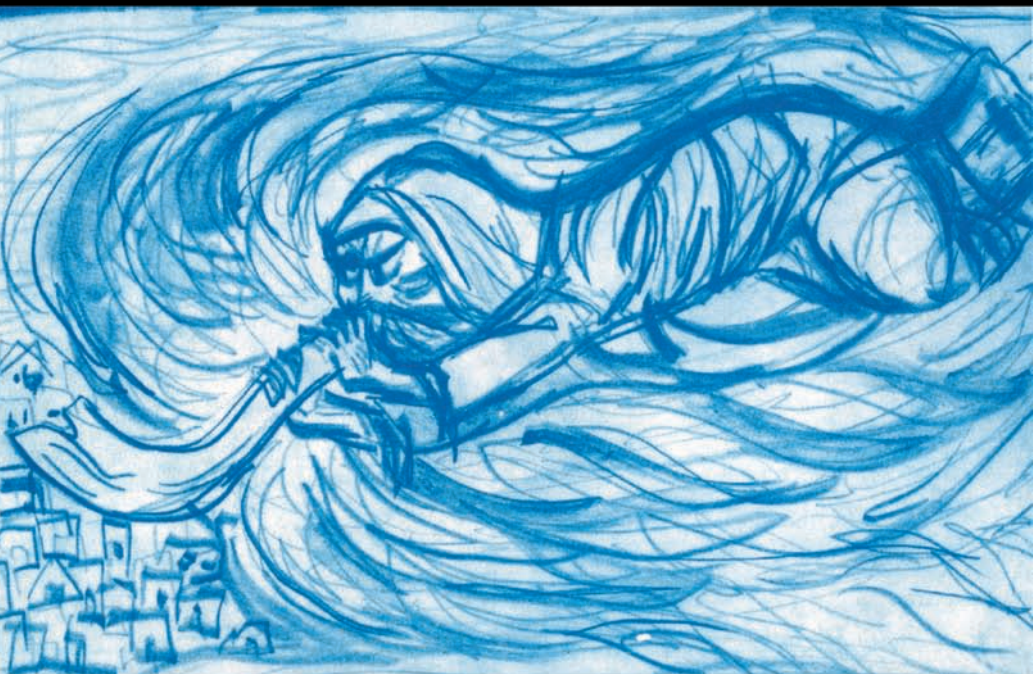




5

Shema Israel

Bible Correspondance Course



The Messiah II

When and Who?

What is Truth?

A strange question perhaps, yet one that expresses both our confusion and our skepticism regarding truth. Confusion, because with a multiplicity of religions and a diversity of beliefs around us we may genuinely wonder, “*Where is the truth?*” Skepticism, for it suggests that truth does not exist; in fact, there really is no objective truth.

The Hebrew Bible, the *Tanakh*, answers the question clearly. “*Hashem, God is the truth*” (Jeremiah 10:10; literal translation). For the Bible then, truth does exist; truth *is* association with God Himself. In fact, truth, *Emeth*, in the Hebrew language, is one of the 13 attributes of God. It falls seventh in the list in the exact center of the 13 attributes listed in Exodus 34:6; literal translation, a passage that is recited in the liturgies of Rosh Ha-Shanah Yom Kippur (Jewish New Year, Day of Attonement).

If truth is identified with God’s character, it does not come from us but is to be found outside of us – in God. This recognition implies that in order to find the truth we should not approach it with the preconceived idea that we know what the truth is. Instead, we should approach the truth with a question, “*What is it?*” This is the very same question, in fact, the ancient Israelites asked when confronted with the *manna*, the bread of God in the wilderness. “*What is it?*” they asked, and the question gave the name to this heavenly bread, for the Hebrew word *manna* means “*What is it?*” The meaning of the word *manna* suggests an important lesson regarding how we should approach Biblical truth. We should approach it with the question: “*What is it? What is truth?*” We should approach it with the same humble and honest mindset as the ancient Israelites approached the *manna* in the wilderness, asking “*What is it?*” Asking the question from this frame of reference no longer suggests confusion or skepticism. Instead, it implies sincere questioning from one who expects a true answer from above.

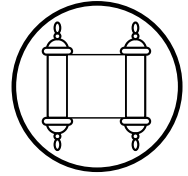
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Mail: *Shabbat Shalom*
Andrews University
Berrien Springs, MI 49104-1535
Fax: (269) 471-6202
e-mail: sshalom@andrews.edu

Bible Study – Lesson # 5*

The Messiah II (When and Who?)



Who is the Messiah?

The following story is told about Martin Buber who was addressing an audience of Catholic priests.

Buber remarked: “What is the difference between Jews and Christians? We all await the Messiah. You believe He has already come and gone, while we do not. I therefore propose that we await Him together. And when He appears, we can ask Him, Were You here before?” Then he paused and added: “And I hope at that moment I will be close enough to whisper in his ear, ‘For the love of heaven, don’t answer.’” (Cited in Elie Wiesel, *All Rivers Run to the Sea* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), pp. 354-355.)

“The Messiah will come.” The song resonates throughout Israel and echoes Mamonides’ creed: “*yavo hamashiah.*” “He will come” claims the New Testament, and Christians echo this refrain when they cry out “Maranatha.” All declare the same hope; yet they are divided on the Messiah’s identity. So the question remains at the core of the unfolding Judeo-Christian drama: if the Messiah is one and only, then who is he?

Arguments rage on because we still don’t understand that what matters is not whether we have recognized him but whether he will recognize us!

**Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are taken from the New International Reader’s Version of the Bible, Copyright 1998, by the Zondervan Corporation.*

1. Can a Biblical prophet also predict the exact time of a future event?

In that year I learned from the Scriptures that Jerusalem would remain destroyed for 70 years (Daniel 9:2). (cf. Jeremiah 25:11)

- Daniel “one of the greatest of the prophets . . . we believe that Daniel conversed with God; for he did not only prophesy of future events, as did the other prophets, but he also determined the time of their accomplishment” (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities* XI, 7).

2. What is the purpose of the 70-weeks prophecy?

“ Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy” (Daniel 9:24).

- “It is the King Messiah of whom it is written ‘to bring an everlasting righteousness’” (*Bereshith Rabbati* on Genesis 14:18).

3. What kind of Messiah is implied in the 70-weeks prophecy?

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“Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined” (Daniel 9:25, 26).

- A literary clue: the connection with the introduction (Daniel 9:2) pointing to the coming of the Messiah Cyrus (Isaiah 45: 1); Cyrus ends a sabbatical period (7x10yrs.) while this Messiah ends a jubilee (7x7x10yrs).
- A syntactical clue: a comparison between the syntax of the words in the prayer (definite language: “our vision,” “the vision of,” etc.) and the syntax of the words in the prophecy (indefinite language: “vision,” “sins,” “prophets, etc.”) suggests a universal scope that would then imply a universal Messiah.

4. What is the starting point of the 70 weeks?

“Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times” (Daniel 9:25).

The elders of the Jews continued to build the temple. They enjoyed great success because of the preaching of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Zechariah belonged to the family line of Iddo. The people finished building the temple. That’s what the God of Israel had commanded them to do. Cyrus and Darius had given orders allowing them to do it. Later, Artaxerxes supplied many things that were needed in the temple. Those three men were kings of Persia (Ezra 6:14).

5. Why is Artaxerxes’ decree the one that is intended in the prophecy?

“Ezra, appoint judges and other court officials. When you do it, use the wisdom your God gives you. Those you appoint should do what is right and fair when they judge people. They should do it for everyone who lives west of the Euphrates. They should do it for everyone who knows the laws of your God. And I want you to teach the

people who don't know those laws"
(Ezra 7:25). (cf. vs. 27-28)

- The last decree
- The most complete decree that also concerns the temple
- The only decree that is followed by a blessing (vs. 27-28)
- After this decree, Ezra shifts from Aramaic (language of exile) to Hebrew (language of national restoration).

6. What kind of "weeks" is implied in the 70-weeks prophecy?

At that time I was very sad for three weeks (Daniel 10:2).

- In Hebrew, this text says "weeks of days" implying that the weeks of Daniel 3 are of another order "weeks of years".

Let each day you lie there stand for one year of their sin. So you will keep Israel's sin on you for 390 days (Ezekiel 4:5). (cf. Job 10:5)

- "A week in Daniel 9 means a week of years" (Talmud b. *Yoma* 54a).
- On the words "one week" in Daniel 9:27, "A week represents a period of seven years" (*Lamentations Rabbah* 34).

7. Why should the periods of “7 weeks and 62 weeks” be connected together in order to lead to the coming of the Messiah?

“ Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy”

(Daniel 9:24).

- See the Reading Document on the structure and analysis of the nature of the *Athnach* (usually a disjunctive accent).

8. What is the moment which marks the end of the 69 weeks (7 plus 62 weeks) hence the predicted moment of the coming of the Messiah?

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as He was praying, heaven was opened. The Holy Spirit came down on Him in the form of a dove. A voice came from heaven. It said, “You are my Son, and I love you. I am very pleased with you” (Luke 3:21-22). (cf. 3:1; 4:18-21)

9. What will happen to this Messiah, and how will this event affect “sacrifice and offering”?

And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off...He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering... (Daniel 9: 27).

10. What other event was also predicted in the 70-weeks prophecy?

The army of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the temple. The end will come like a flood. War will continue until the end. The Lord has ordered that many places be destroyed (Daniel 9:26). (cf. Mark 13: 14)

- “Daniel also wrote concerning the Roman government and that our country should be made desolate by them” (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities*, book 10, ch. 11, 7).
- “There was a certain ancient oracle of those men (the Jewish prophets) that the city (Jerusalem) should then be taken and the sanctuary burnt by right of war” (Flavius Josephus, *Wars*, book IV, ch. 6, 3).
- “Rabba said . . . ‘Indeed it was known that it will be destroyed (the Temple), but how could they know when?’ Abay answered: ‘They knew when since it is written in Daniel 9:24, “Seventy weeks have been determined on your

people and on the holy city”””
(Talmud *b. Nazir* 32b).

11. How did the Jews respond to Jesus?

Everyone said good things about him. They were amazed at the gracious words they heard from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son,” they asked (Luke 4:22)? (cf. John 12:12-15; Acts 4:4; 21:20)

- In that time lived Jesus, a wise man, . . . He performed miracles and taught the people who received with joy the truth, and he brought many to go with him” (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18, 3.3).

12. What was the main argument which convinced many Jews that Jesus was the Messiah?

All of this took place to bring about what the Lord had said would happen. He has said through the prophet, “The virgin is going to have a baby...” (Matthew 1:22, 23).

They decided to meet Paul on a certain day. At that time even more people came to the place where he was staying. From morning until evening, he told them about God’s kingdom and explained it to them. Using the Law of Moses and the Prophets, he tried to get them to believe in Jesus (Acts 28: 23).



13. Who is the only Jewish Messiah who has survived and outgrown local space and time?

“So let me give you some advice. Leave these men alone! Let them go! If their plans and actions are only human, they will fail. But if their plans come from God, you won’t be able to stop these men. You will only find yourselves fighting against God” (Acts 5:38-39).

14. Why was it necessary for the Messiah to come a first time?

A covenant will be put into effect with many people for one ‘week.’ (Daniel 9:27).

15. Is it possible for a Jew to believe in Jesus as his Messiah and still remain a Jew?

Then Paul said, “I am a Jew. I was born in Tarsus in Cilicia. But I grew up here in Jerusalem. I was well trained by Gamaliel in the law of our people. I wanted to serve God as much as any of you do today” (Acts 22:3).

- The Talmud records a number of famous rabbis (e.g., Elisha ben Abuyah, Simeon ben Zoma, etc.) who were identified as Christians and were still accepted as Jews

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and even as respected sages and leaders who were treated by their associates “with sensitive consideration” (see Samson H. Levy, “The Best Kept Secret of Rabbinic Tradition,” *Judaism* [1972]: 469).

The Prophecy of the Coming of the Messiah*

The 70 Weeks of Daniel 9

notes

Literal Translation of the Prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27)

v24 *Seventy weeks have been severed about your people, your holy city to finish the transgression, to bring an end to sins, to atone for iniquity, to bring everlasting righteousness, to seal vision and prophet, to anoint the holy of holies. v25 You should know and comprehend that from the going out of the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah prince, seven weeks and sixty-two weeks, it will be restored and rebuilt, streets and trench, even in anguished times. v26 Then after the 62 weeks, Messiah will be cut off, and no one to (help) him. The people of the prince who is coming will destroy the city and the holy, and it will end in a flood; until the end of war, desolations are determined. v27 He will broaden covenant with many one week. In the middle of the week will cease altar and offering. And on the wing of abominations, desolating, until the end and what has been determined will be poured on the one that desolates.*

God's answer to the prayer of Daniel (Ch. 9: 4-19) is Gabriel's announcement of the Messiah: "Here is what I want you to know and understand. There will be seven 'weeks.' Then there will be 62 'weeks.' The seven 'weeks' will begin when an order is given

* Taken from Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jewish Priest in Exile* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000) 135-156. Used by permission.

to rebuild Jerusalem and make it like new again. At the end of the 62 'weeks,' the Anointed King will come. Jerusalem will have streets and a water system when it is rebuilt. But that will be done in the times of trouble" (Daniel 9:25).

In Biblical tradition, the "Messiah" is a person who has been set apart with a mission to save the people. The Hebrew word *mashiah* (messiah) is a passive form of the verb *mashah* (to anoint). *Mashiah* (Messiah) designates him who has been "anointed." The person designated as a messiah usually went through a ceremony that initiated his role. Someone anointed the person with oil, symbolizing the transmission of strength and wisdom, as well as, the faith of the anointer in the success of the newly appointed messiah.

Priests, prophets, and even kings were anointed to become messiahs. The history of Israel accounts for several messiahs. Aaron is called messiah (Exodus 28:41; Leviticus 16:32), likewise the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 61:1), King Saul (2 Samuel 1:14), David (1 Samuel 16:6, 13), and even a foreign prince, Cyrus (Isaiah 45:1). The hope of Israel was thus maintained from messiah to messiah.

The prophecy of the seventy weeks doesn't just concern *a* messiah, but *the* Messiah. In consulting the prophecy of the seventy years (9:2), Daniel expected one particular messiah, Cyrus. The prophecy of the seventy weeks, on the other hand, has universal repercussions. The prophecy of seventy weeks is the universal version of the

prophecy of seventy years. This is already implied in the language of the passage. The seventy years (7 X 10) of Jeremiah, lead to the messiah of the Sabbatical year, whereas the seventy weeks, or “seventy sevens” (7 X 7 X 10), lead to a messiah of Jubilee.

This is why this last Messiah leads to the Jubilee, the Levitical festival symbolizing the re-creation of the world. This Sabbath of sabbaths, coming up every seven-times-seven years, is a time of “grace and liberty” (Isaiah 61:1-2), when humanity and nature are born anew (Leviticus 25:8-17).

Three things must be cleared up in order to decode the prophetic period: the point of departure, the duration, and the point of arrival.

1. The Point of Departure

The coming of the Messiah is the outcome of human words (verse 25) announcing the restoration of Jerusalem, which echo the divine words (verse 23) answering the prayer of Daniel. The same word *davar* (“word”) is used in both cases. In other words, the word from below which announces the reconstruction of Jerusalem is the answer to the word from above which inspires it. This word is the point of departure of the prophetic period of the seventy weeks: “*Here is what I want you to know and understand. There will be seven ‘weeks.’ Then there will be 62 ‘weeks’*” (Daniel 9:25).

The book of Ezra proclaims that the city of Jerusalem would be rebuilt at the issue of three successive decrees, one by Cyrus, one

by Darius, and another by Artaxerxes (Ezra 6:14).

The first decree, issued in 538 by Cyrus, inaugurated the return of the first exiles. In one year, about fifty thousand Jews returned to their land (Ezra 2:64). But this decree was essentially concerned with the reconstruction of the temple; it authorized the return of 5,400 cultic utensils that had formerly belonged to it (Ezra 1:11). The second decree, issued in 519 by Darius the First, Hystapes (not Darius the Mede) only confirmed the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 6:3-12). The third decree was issued by Artaxerxes, otherwise known as Longimanus (long-armed, Ezra 7:13-26). Several elements point to it, as being “the decree” mentioned in the prophecy:

1. It is the last decree, therefore the only effective one. In fact, Ezra uses the word decree in the singular to designate all three decrees, as though to imply their common purpose.
2. This decree is the most thorough one, concerning both the reconstruction of the temple and the reestablishment of the political and administrative structures of Jerusalem (Ezra 7:25).
3. And finally, this decree is the only one where God’s intervention is explicitly mentioned: *People of Israel, give praise to the Lord. He is the God of our people who lived long ago...The Lord has shown his good favor to me. The strong hand of the Lord my God helped me. That gave me new strength. So I gathered together leaders*

from Israel to go up to Jerusalem with me (Ezra 7:27-28).

Significantly, this passage marks a transition from Aramaic, the language of exile, to Hebrew, the language of Israel. The decree of Artaxerxes introduces this linguistic shift, a turning point in the history of Israel, announcing the fact that the national restoration has indeed started. According to the book of Ezra, Artaxerxes issued his decree late in the seventh year of his reign (Ezra 7:8), that is, in early *fall* of 457 B.C.E.¹ Ezra left Babylon on the first day of the first month and arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month (Ezra 7:8-9). Therefore, 457 is the point of departure for our prophecy.

2. *The Duration*

These weeks are prophetic; one day, therefore, corresponds to one year. In Daniel, these weeks should be read as weeks of years. Immediately following chapter 9, the first words of chapter 10 directly confirm the interpretation given above. When it mentions three weeks of fasting, the Hebrew text chooses to add the precise “three weeks of days” (verse 2, literal translation), the only occurrence in the entire Bible of such a careful distinction. It is as though to distinguish between two sorts of weeks, the week of years in Daniel 9 and the week of days in chapter 10.

¹ History tells us that Artaxerxes began his reign in 465 B.C.E., the year of his ascending the throne (see “Artaxerxes,” in Universal Larousse). According to the Bible, however, the first year of his reign would have begun at the beginning of the next year, in Tishri (see Jer. 25:1 and Dan. 1:1, 2; cf. 2 Kings 18:1,9,10; cf. Mishna Rosh Hashanah 1.1). The seventh year of Artaxerxes would then extend from fall (Tishri) 458 to fall 457.

The equation of “day-year” appears throughout the Bible. Narratives often employ the word “days” (yamim) in the sense of years to the extent that most versions actually translate it as “years” (see Exodus 13:10; Judges 11:40; 1 Samuel 1: 21; 2:19; 27:7; Numbers 9:22; 1 Kings 11: 42; Genesis 47:9, etc.). The poetic passages of the Bible contain many parallelisms between “days” and “years”: *“Your days aren’t like the days of a human being. Your years aren’t like the years of a mere man”* (Job 10:5); *“I thought about days gone by. I thought about the years of long ago”* (Psalm 77:5); *“He has sent me to announce the year when he will set his people free. He wants me to announce the day when he will pay his enemies back”* (Isaiah 61:2).

This principle can also be found in Levitical texts. During six years, the Israelite farmer was to work his land; the seventh year he was to let it be idle and the harvest was to be shared with all – the slave like the foreigner, the poor like the rich. This seventh year of rest was called a Sabbath, like the seventh day of the week (Leviticus 25:1-7), with the difference that it was a “Sabbath of years” and not a “Sabbath of days.” This same language is used with regard to the Jubilee: “Count off seven sabbaths of years—seven times seven years” (Leviticus 25:8).

This principle also applied to prophecies concerning the future. Thus, the forty days in which the spies explored Canaan become forty years of wandering in the desert. *“For 40 years you will suffer for your sins. That is one year for each of the 40 days you checked out the land. You will know what*

it is like to have me against you” (Numbers 14:34). Likewise, the prophet Ezekiel is commanded by God to lie on his left side for so many days, each day symbolizing a year: “Let each day you lie there stand for one year of their sin. So you will keep Israel’s sin on you for 390 days” (Ezekiel 4:5).

Both Jewish and Christian tradition have understood the weeks of Daniel as weeks of years. Among numerous works, from the Hellenistic literature texts is *The Book of Jubilees* (third century B.C.E.), *The Testament of Levy* (first century B.C.E.), *The First Book of Enoch* (second century B.C.E.); in the Qumran literature (second century B.C.E.), texts like *II Q Melchitsedeq*, the *4 Q 384-390 Pseudo-Ezekiel*, the *Damascus Document*; in the Rabbinical literature, texts such as the *Seder Olam* (second century C.E.), the *Talmud*, the *Midrash Rabbah*, and later the classical exegetes of the Middle Ages such as Saadia Gaon, Rashi, Ibn Ezra in the *Miqraoth Gdoloth*.² All testify from ancient times to the validity of this interpretation. The day-year principle is probably the most ancient and solid principle used to bring the meaning out of this passage.

Indivisible weeks. The vision’s weeks of years lead to the coming of the Messiah: “...There will be seven ‘weeks.’ Then there will be 62 ‘weeks’ . . . After the 62 ‘weeks,’ the Anointed King will be cut off” (9:25-26).

The coming of the Messiah is to occur after the sixty-two weeks which are added to the

² Jacques Doukhan, *Drinking at the Sources* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1981), p. 67.

seven weeks. There is no break between the seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks, as some translations might imply. And yet, the Massoretic text, that is, the text punctuated and vocalized by the Massoretes in the tenth century C.E. (our Hebrew version), indicates a disjunctive accent (*Athnakh*) which seems to indicate a break after “seven weeks.”

1. The first reason is logical and contextual. Already the introduction sums the weeks up as seventy: “seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city” (verse 24).

2. The second reason is stylistic.³ The structure of the text is built upon the two entwined themes of the Messiah and Jerusalem, each with a distinctive key word. Each time the text refers to the Messiah (A¹, A², A³), the word weeks (*shabuim*) appears; each time the text refers to Jerusalem (B¹, B², B³), the word trench/decreed (*hrs*) appears.

Therefore, we infer from the structure that the break should come only after the 62 weeks (and not after the 7 weeks), as is the case in the ancient translations such as the Septuagint Bible, the Syriac Bible, and the even in the Qumran version of the text.⁴

3. The third reason is derived from the syntax and use of the Masoretic disjunctive accent, the *Athnakh* attached to the word “seven”. Indeed, the use of the *athnach* does not always mean separation. It is

³ Jacques Doukhan, “The Seventy Weeks of Dan. 9: An Exegetical Study,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 17, No. 1 (1979): 12-14.

⁴ Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York, 1997), p. 127.

often used to mark an emphasis.⁵ Thus in Genesis 1:1 the *athnach* is put under the verb *bara* (create) not to mark a separation between this verb and its complement object “heavens and earth” but rather to emphasize the divine operation of creation. Therefore, the weeks of Daniel 9 constitute an indivisible sum. We should read the 62 weeks in conjunction with the 7 weeks. On the basis of the date of the beginning of the prophecy (457 B.C.E.) and its duration (70 weeks of years) it becomes possible to determine the end of the prophecy and to discover the event to which the prophecy leads.

3. *The Point of Arrival*

His coming. The coming of the Messiah is then awaited for 69 weeks of years, that is, 483 years (69 times 7) from the point of departure, 457 B.C.E. The seventieth week would then be the year 27 of our era. In the history of Israel and of the world, this year was marked by the coming of an individual called “*Christos*” (Greek rendition of the word Anointed/Messiah). This is precisely the year when Jesus was baptized and “anointed” by the Spirit (Luke 3:21-22). The event is dated by Luke in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar (3:1).⁶ This is the year when Jesus inaugurates his ministry as Messiah by reading publicly from the text of Isaiah his own job-description! *The Spirit of the Lord is on me. He has anointed me to tell the good news to poor people. He has sent me to announce freedom for prisoners.*

⁵ William Wickes, *Two Treatises on the Accentuation of the Old Testament* (New York: 1970), parts I:32-35; II:4.

⁶ Doukhan, *Drinking at the Sources*, 135-6, n. 186

He has sent me so that the blind will see again. He wants me to free those who are beaten down (Luke 4:18-19).

By referencing the Jubilee, Jesus situates himself directly in the perspective of the prophecy of the seventy weeks, which also describes the same event in terms of Jubilee (see above). Jesus thus defines himself as the fulfillment of the prophecy: “*And he began by saying to them: ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’*” (Luke 4:21).

His death. The text of the prophecy even goes so far as to predict the death of the Messiah: “*After the 62 weeks Messiah will be cut off . . . In the middle of the week he shall make to cease sacrifice and offering*” (verses 26-27; literal translation).

The violence implied in the death of the Messiah is rendered by the Hebrew verb “cut down” (*krt*). Interestingly, this verb in the passive form usually designates, in the legal parts of the Pentateuch, a person condemned to death. The verb is in a tense which implies a brutal and definitive action. But the death of the Messiah was also described in Levitical terms. The verb *krt* belongs to the context of the covenant which is made possible through the sacrifices. In Hebrew, the verb *krt* always accompanies the word covenant (Genesis 15:18; Jeremiah 34:13), because in Hebrew, the covenant is cut (*krt*). Thus, the word *krt* is rich in connotations of covenant and of the necessary sacrifice of the lamb (Genesis 15:10; Jeremiah 34:18).

In other words, Daniel announces the

death of the Messiah in terms evocative of the covenant manifested by the death of the lamb in the Levitical system. The introduction of the prophecy of the seventy weeks already alludes to this by mentioning the atonement of sin (verse 24).

The prophecy thus identifies the Messiah with the sacrifice of the covenant. Like the lamb, his death made possible a covenant and assured divine forgiveness. This was a language that the Israelites, living in a context where sacrifice was a part of daily life, could easily understand. The prophet Isaiah would use the same words in describing the suffering servant—representing neither Israel nor the prophet⁷—who must also die like a lamb, in order to ensure forgiveness and salvation: *“All of us are like sheep. We have wandered away from God. All of us have turned to our own way. And the Lord has placed on his servant the sins of all of us”* (Isaiah 53: 6-7). It is thus not surprising that the Jews in the time of Jesus recognized the Messiah as *“The Lamb of God! He takes away the sins of the world!”* (John 1:29), and were able to discern in the daily sacrifices offered at the temple a prefiguration of the Messiah-Savior, *“The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming”* (Hebrews 10: 1).

Consequently, His death should result in the annulling of the sacrifices: *“Now when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices”* (Hebrews 10:18, NLT), just as the prophet Daniel had predicted:

⁷ For the distinction between the servant and Israel, see Isa. 49: 5-7 and 53:4-6.

“sacrifices and offerings will come to an end” (Daniel 9:27).

The death of the Messiah was then to occur in the *middle* of the seventieth week (verse 27). “Middle” is a better translation of the Hebrew term *hatsi* than “half” as some translations seem to infer. In certain contexts, this word does mean “half,” but in a situation where a period of time is concerned, it always means “middle,” as is the case in our passage (see Exodus 12:29; Joshua 10:13; Judges 16:3; Ruth 3:8; Jeremiah 17:11; Psalm 102:25). “In the middle of the week” signifies three years and a half after the year 27 which is the year 31, the year of the crucifixion. The timing and the significance of the death of Jesus of Nazareth falls perfectly in line with the prophecy.

The fall of Jerusalem. Following the death of the Messiah, the prophet Daniel focuses on the destiny of Jerusalem and of the Temple: *“And the people of the aggressive prince shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; its end shall be in a flood; until the end of the war is decreed, desolations . . . and on the wing abominations, desolating until the end, and then what was decreed will be poured upon the desolating power” (9:26-27; literal translation).*

The prophecy is clear enough. It concerns the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. The event is not dated. For in the seventy-weeks prophecy, the chronological data are restricted to the event of the Messiah (see above). We are only informed that there will be “wars,” “desolations,” and

“abominations,” and that the tragedy will take place chronologically sometime after the death of the Messiah.

A strong consensus in Jewish tradition recognizes that this prophecy refers to the Romans who “flooded” into the city and “devastated” the temple, resulting in total “desolation.” Flavius Josephus⁸ who apparently witnessed the event, the Talmud,⁹ and the great medieval rabbis¹⁰ Rashi, Ibn Ezra, etc., all agree to apply this prophetic vision to the siege of Jerusalem by the legions of Vespasian and finally by Titus in C.E. 70.

The covenant It is noteworthy that the prophet Daniel does not describe the work of the Messiah as a “new covenant” which would cancel the “old covenant,” but rather as a strengthening of the original covenant. The word “confirm” (NIV) or “strengthen” (*higbir* from the root *gbr* denoting strength) is used. The encounter with the Messiah is not designed to take the “new convert” outside of Israel; but on the contrary, it was supposed to strengthen Jewish roots and its covenant with the God of Israel.

Moreover, this covenant concerns the *rabbim* (“many”), a technical term that connotes the idea of universality.¹¹ The covenant is not only “strengthened” *with* “many” Jews, but is also extended *to* “many” nations. In contrast to the event of the fall of Jerusalem, this event is situated

⁸ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, 5. 6,10.

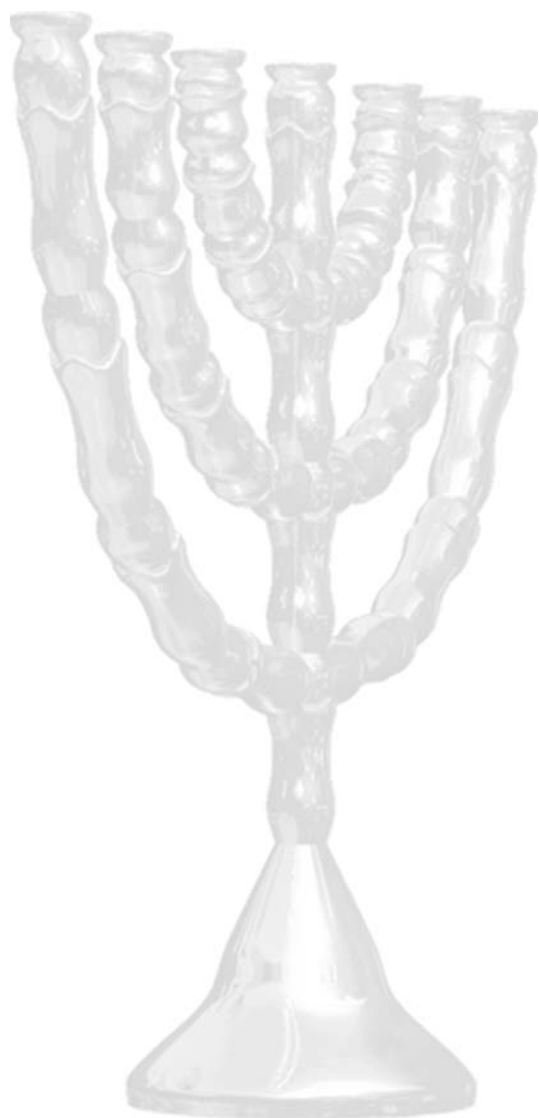
⁹ Bablonian Talmud, Gittin, 56a, 56b, 57b.

¹⁰ Miqraoth Gdoloth.

¹¹ Doukhan, “The Seventy Weeks of Dan. 9,” 21.

in time, for it concerns the Messiah: “*He will strengthen covenant to many one week*” (Dan. 9:27).¹²The prophecy takes us then to the end of the last week of the 70 weeks (34 C.E.). It is noteworthy that the date marks an event that has had a considerable impact on civilization as well as being a key event for humanity’s salvation. It was the year the message of the God of Israel exploded beyond the borders of Palestine and reached the Gentiles, the “many” just mentioned (Acts 8).

¹² Note that the word “for” generally used in our English translations does not appear in the Hebrew.



א

רֹאֵנִי וְלֹא עֹתָהּ
אֲשׁוּרֶנּוּ וְלֹא קָרוֹב
דֶּרֶךְ מִיַּעֲקֹב
יָקִים שֵׁבֶט מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל

במדבר כד. יז

21

*"I see Him, but not now;
I behold Him, but not near;
A Star shall come out of Jacob;
A Scepter shall rise out of Israel."*

Numbers 24:17, NKJV