

Daniel
God's Timetable
Daniel 9: Time Facts or Time Fables

In order to understand the time aspects of the visions of Daniel, it is important to account for all the facts that can be brought to bear on the setting — not leaving anything out, nor inserting anything of our own human invention. Where there appears to be a lack of evidence in support of complete understanding of Daniel's visions, we must be willing to wait patiently for the LORD to allow the missing information to be brought forward. What information is available needs to be made as public as possible so every individual can review the evidence and be convinced of the truth. We must follow the facts, not fables. It also seems important to begin tracing the major events from the same place God does — from the beginning, rather than from the end. It also seems appropriate to cross reference these events with other Jewish historical sources that might be available. From scripture and historical records, consider the following evidence.

God predicted through Isaiah that a leader named Cyrus would give the order to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. Sometime around 700 B.C., during the days before the ten northern tribes of Israel were taken into oblivion by Assyria, Isaiah recorded the following prophecy from the LORD in Isaiah 44:28 - 45:1:

- I am He who says to Cyrus: He is My shepherd, and he shall fulfil all My pleasure; and of Jerusalem, She shall be rebuilt, and of the temple, I will restore your foundations. Thus says the LORD to HIS anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I hold fast to subdue nations before him, and I will loose the loins of kings, to open double doors before him and the gates shall not be closed.

Jeremiah predicted that Judah would be in exile in Babylon for 70 years. Before he became the ruler in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar was sent by his predecessor, king Nabopolassar, who ruled Babylon from 625 to 605 B.C., to capture the fertile crescent from the Egyptians. This included the southern kingdom of Judah and was first conquered by Nebuchadnezzar in 606/605 B.C. and some of its people taken captive and sent to Babylon. Daniel was among these. Nebuchadnezzar continued to pursue the Egyptians until he received word in 605 that his father had died, at which time he returned to Babylon to secure his position as king. Because of their refusal to cooperate, Nebuchadnezzar made two more trips to Jerusalem to install leaders who would be more cooperative with his orders. Jeremiah had instructed the people of Judah that they should cooperate with Nebuchadnezzar and that they would be captives in Babylon for 70 years. Jeremiah 21:8-10; 25:11-12; 29:6, 10.

Near the end of the 70 years, Daniel prayed for God to fulfill His promise to return His people to Jerusalem. Daniel 9 begins with Daniel's notice of Jeremiah's 70 year prophecy (v. 1-3) and his prayer for the LORD to remember His people and the promise to take them back to Jerusalem at the end of the 70 years (v. 4-19). Daniel recognizes that His people have not become any better during this time of exile and so are not worthy of deliverance, but Daniel is concerned with God's reputation as the God who can make predictions and then fulfill them. From Daniel's perspective the 70 years is just about completed and there is no sign that God is about to fulfill His prophecy. Daniel may have been afraid that the 2300 days of the vision of Daniel 8 would be added to the 70 years of Jeremiah.

Gabriel met Daniel and told him about the "70 sevens" that would begin when the order to

restore Jerusalem was given. Instead of giving Daniel an answer to his prayer for the fulfillment of the 70 years of which Jeremiah wrote, Gabriel gave Daniel a completely different vision of what Daniel says is *70 sevens*. Most translations render this *70 weeks* as the Hebrew word is *shâbûa'* (שבוע) and literally means *sevens*. This word appears 19 times in scripture and in every instance it is translated to mean *weeks*. While it is always translated to mean *weeks*, is it possible that it has a secondary meaning that should apply in this situation?

The *70 sevens* are divided up into three segments; the first segment of seven *sevens* covers the time for rebuilding Jerusalem, sixty-two *sevens* pass without anything remarkable happening, then after the sixty-two *sevens* the innocent Messiah is slain. A people will come to destroy the city and the sanctuary and its end will be overwhelming. In one *seven* He shall make the covenant to prevail for many, and in the middle of the *seven* He will cause sacrifice and offering to cease. Then on a wing of horrors a foreign power will bring complete desolation.

Ezra confirms that Cyrus, the king of Persia, in the first year of his reign, gave the order for the Jews to return to Jerusalem. Ezra 1:1. Ezra cites the 70 year prophecy of Jeremiah, but this reference to Cyrus also confirms the prophecy made through Isaiah that Cyrus would be the servant of the LORD to order the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple of God. This is testimony to God's foreknowledge as He has seen fit to reveal His will through prophecy.

The order given by Cyrus for the Jews to return to Jerusalem specifically included the provision to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the Temple of God. The Jewish historian Josephus records the order of Cyrus in his writings entitled *The Antiquities of the Jews* at 11.1.2-3. This order was given in the first year of his reign which would have been 538/537 and marks the beginning of the prophecy of the *70 sevens* of Daniel 9. Notice the pertinent parts of the order as recorded by Josephus:

2. ⁵This was known to Cyrus by his reading the book which Isaiah left behind him of his prophecies; for this prophet said that God had spoken thus to him in a secret vision;—"My will is, that Cyrus, whom I have appointed to be king over many and great nations, send back my people to their own land, and build my temple."⁶This was foretold by Isaiah one hundred and forty years before the temple was demolished. Accordingly, when Cyrus read this, and admired the divine power, an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfill what was so written; so he called for the most eminent Jews that were in Babylon, and said to them, that **he gave them leave to go back to their own country, and to rebuild their city Jerusalem, and the temple of God,**⁷for that he would be their assistant, and that he would write to the rulers and governors that were in the neighborhood of their country of Judea, that they should contribute to them gold and silver for the building of the temple, and, beside that, beasts for their sacrifices.

3. ⁸When Cyrus had said this to the Israelites, the rulers of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with the Levites and priests, went in haste to Jerusalem, yet did many of them stay at Babylon, as not willing to leave their possessions; ⁹and when they were come thither, all the king's friends assisted them, and brought in, for the building of the temple, some gold, and some silver, and some a great many cattle and horses. So they performed their vows to God, and offered the sacrifices that had been accustomed of old time; **I mean this upon the rebuilding of their city, and the revival of the ancient practices relating to their worship.** ¹⁰Cyrus also sent back to them the vessels of God which king Nebuchadnezzar had pillaged out of the temple, and carried to Babylon. ¹¹So he committed these things to Mithridates, the treasurer, to be sent away, with an order to give them to Sanabassar, that he might keep them till the temple was built; and when it was finished, he might deliver them to the priest and rulers of the multitude, in order to their being restored to the temple. ¹²Cyrus also sent an epistle to the governors that were in Syria, the contents whereof here follow:—

"KING CYRUS TO SISINNES AND SATHRABUZANES, SENDETH GREETING.

"I have given leave to as many of the Jews that dwell in my country as please to return to their own

country, and to rebuild their city, and to rebuild the temple of God at Jerusalem, on the same place where it was before. ¹³I have also sent my treasurer, Mithridates, and Zorobabel, the governor of the Jews, that they may lay the foundations of the temple, and may build it sixty cubits high, and of the same latitude, making three edifices of polished stones, and one of the wood of the country, and the same order extends to the altar whereon they offer sacrifices to God. ¹⁴I require also, that the expenses for these things may be given out of my revenues. Moreover, I have also sent the vessels which king Nebuchadnezzar pillaged out of the temple, and have given them to Mithridates the treasurer, and to Zorobabel the governor of the Jews, that they may have them carried to Jerusalem, and may restore them to the temple of God..." [Bold added.] Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.1.2-3.

The first group of Jews returned to Jerusalem in 536 B.C. and immediately began to rebuild the Temple. As the work of restoration was interrupted, subsequent orders were sought to reinstate the rebuilding process. **The subsequent orders given by Darius and Xerxes I (called Artaxerxes in Ezra) all refer back to this original order issued by Cyrus and do not go beyond the scope of this order.** The order recorded in Ezra 7:12-26, often cited as the order that authorized the rebuilding of the city presumably in 457 B.C., does not include any authority to rebuild the city of Jerusalem or even just its walls. The order recorded by Josephus issued by Xerxes I sometime before his death in 465 B.C. does include provision to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. *Antiquities*, 11.5.6.¹⁶⁵⁻¹⁶⁶

After the death of Cyrus in 530 B.C., his son Cambyses stopped the restoration process in Jerusalem until his death in 521 B.C. After the death of Cambyses, civil war broke out for about a year until seven influential Persian families together appointed Darius, the son of Hystaspes, as their king. Darius had privately vowed to God that if he became king, he would send all the vessels of God that were in Babylon to the Temple in Jerusalem. (*Antiquities*, 11.3.1) Zorobabel reminded him that his vow included the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple of God. (*Antiquities*, 11.3.7) The Temple was built in seven years' time; it was completed in the ninth year of the reign of Darius, on the twenty-third day of the twelfth month. (*Antiquities*, 11.4.7) This was most likely 511 B.C. Although the Temple was restored to a useful condition and some streets and homes had been restored, significant portions of the city walls and its gates were still in ruins.

While Darius was still alive, he selected his son Xerxes I (*Ahasuerus*) to inherit his throne and appointed him as governor in Babylon perhaps as early as 498 B.C. There is a sculpture of Xerxes I in the palace of Persepolis made sometime in the 490's with the inscription that his father had selected him to be king. Darius died in 486 B.C. According to Josephus, Nehemiah was instrumental in securing the order from Xerxes I in the 25th year of his reign to complete rebuilding the city and the Temple. *Antiquities*, 11.5.7. We can't be certain of this date since we don't know exactly which year Xerxes I began to rule in Babylon. The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem were completed in two years and four months, which was the 28th year and ninth month of the reign of Xerxes I. (*Antiquities*, 11.5.8. To confirm the dating, see *An Encyclopedia of World History*, page 40, *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Sixth Edition, 2001, Xerxes I, and <http://www.herodotuswebsite.co.uk/xerxes.htm>.) Nehemiah 6:15 tells us the work of rebuilding the walls was completed in 52 days. This had to be completed by 465 B.C. when Xerxes I was assassinated. Thus, **the first segment of the prophecy of Daniel 9 was already completed by the time William Miller and other early Adventists said the 70 week prophecy should begin.**

The name of the king most often cited in Ezra as Artaxerxes does not match the Jewish

historical record of the name of the king of Persia at that time. The story of Ezra 7 is an excellent match with the story of Xerxes I (520-465 B.C.) in *Antiquities*, 11.5.1.¹²³⁻¹³⁰, even though it is usually cited as occurring during the years of Artaxerxes I (458/457 B.C.). In Ezra 7, the king of Persia who returned many of the Jews to Jerusalem is called Artaxerxes I, but in *Antiquities* and *The Wars of the Jews*, 2.6.2. he is Xerxes I. Moreover, the experience of waiting by the river Ahava in Ezra 8:21-22 is clearly reflected in *Antiquities*, 11.5.2¹³⁴⁻¹³⁵, which is within the time Xerxes I was in power. **Actually Artaxerxes, Xerxes, and Ahasuerus are titles, not names, so they might be applied to a number of different individuals.** According to Josephus (*Antiquities*, 11.5.6-7), the king of Persia that Nehemiah secured orders from was Xerxes I, who is also called *Ahasuerus*. This is not the same person called *Ahasuerus* in the book of Esther; that person is Artaxerxes I Longimanus, whose birth name was actually Cyrus and whom the Greeks called Artaxerxes. *Antiquities*, 11.6.1. It might be tempting to think that this Cyrus is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 44 since he ruled from 465–424 B.C., just the right time to fit William Miller’s understanding regarding the significance of the year 457 B.C., but by the time he arrives on the scene both the Temple and city of Jerusalem—including its walls and gates—have already been restored. This man didn’t issue any orders to send the Jews back to Jerusalem or rebuild the Temple. This is the man who was married to Vashti and took Esther as his queen in her place, and from the subsequent events regarding Haman’s offer to kill all the Jews came the Feast of Purim.

The seventh year of the reign of king Artaxerxes mentioned in Ezra 7:7-8 is actually the seventh year that Xerxes I was governor in Babylon, and fits the time he was co-regent with his father Darius. Eighteen years later, in the 25th year of his reign, Nehemiah secured an order from this same ruler to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. *Antiquities*, 11.5.7. This king, whether by the title of Artaxerxes or Xerxes, is dead by the year 465 B.C.

There are two major theories as to when Ezra returned to Jerusalem. The dominant theory is that he returned about the year 458 B.C. and Nehemiah following him to rebuild the walls in about 445 B.C. Another theory proposes that he returned somewhat later around 397 B.C. with Nehemiah following a few years later. However, the Jewish historian Josephus identifies that Ezra was a personal friend of Xerxes I and secured permission to take back the vessels of the Temple from him. *Antiquities*, 11.5.1. Xerxes I was governor in Babylon before his father’s death in 486 and ruled on his own until his own death in 465 B.C.

How did William Miller and other early Adventists come to the conclusion that the prophecy of Daniel 9 and the 2300 days of Daniel 8 began in 457 B.C. and that Jesus entered the Most Holy place in 1844? The lesson authors assume a date for beginning of Messiah’s Earthly ministry, then merely count backwards 483 years (69 weeks) to arrive at 457 B.C. as the acceptable date for the beginning of the prophecy of Daniel 9. However, that ignores the historical record of when the various orders were issued and requires the rejection of the prophecy of the LORD Himself as recorded in Isaiah 44:28 - 45:1 that Cyrus would issue the order to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple.

What did the apostles understand in their day about where Jesus was after His ascension?

Acts 2:32-35

Jesus was raised to be at the right side of

God.

Acts 7:55 Steven said, "Look! I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right side of God!"

Hebrews 1:3 After achieving forgiveness for the sins of all human beings, Jesus took His seat at the right hand of God.

Hebrews 6:19-20 Jesus has gone through the curtain of the heavenly temple into the inner sanctuary.

Hebrews 8:1-2 We have a High Priest who sits at the right hand of the Divine Majesty of Heaven. He serves as the high priest in the Most Holy Place.

Hebrews 9:12 Christ went through the tent and entered once for all into the Most Holy Place and offered His own blood for our eternal salvation.

Hebrews 9:23-24 Christ appears not in the Holy Place in the sanctuary, but went into heaven itself on our behalf in the presence of God.

Luke and the writer of Hebrews (probably Barnabus) clearly understood that Jesus went directly to the Father to be at His right side when He ascended on the 40th day after His resurrection. **Scripture is certain that Jesus was not limited to a ministry in the Holy Place prior to 1844.** The concept that Jesus began a new ministry in 1844 and entered the Most Holy place at that time is contrary to scripture.

According to Ellen G. White, the vision of the 2300 days given in Daniel 8 was not completed in 1844, but was still in the process of being fulfilled in 1896—some fifty-two years after 1844—when she wrote:

- "The light that Daniel received direct from God was given especially for these last days. The visions he saw by the banks of the Ulai and the Hiddekel, the great rivers of Shinar, are now in process of fulfillment, and all the events foretold will soon have come to pass (Letter 57, 1896)." {TM 112.3, 4BC 1166.5}

If the events of this vision had not yet come to pass in 1896 so that it was still in the process of being fulfilled, then it is impossible for the events of this vision to have begun in 457 B.C.

The event that brings the prophecy of Daniel 9 to an end is the overwhelming destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple of God for the second time. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple occurred in A.D. 70. This is exactly the event that triggers the beginning of the 2300 days in the vision of Daniel 8. The end of the prophecy in Daniel 9 is not tied to the martyr of a holy man such as Stephen in A.D. 34, and that explanation fails to account for the destruction of the city and the Temple as the conclusion of the prophecy.

The standard explanation given by the theologians of the SDA church regarding the dates for the prophecy of Daniel 9 do not match the historical records. Neither does the year/day principle quite fit the historical record of Daniel 9. 537 B.C. to A.D. 70 is 606 years, not the 490 years one needs for 70 weeks to be the correct understanding of the time of this prophecy. Is it possible that there will yet be discovered a *Rosetta Stone* type document that will provide the

information to resolve these discrepancies? In the meantime, can an explanation that is contrary to both scripture and history be justified or acceptable? In light of the fact that Daniel was told that the words of the book are sealed until the time of the end (Daniel 12:4 & 9), how hard should we work to try to invent an explanation for these events. When they are unsealed by God, will not the meanings be obvious to everyone?

The prophecy of Daniel 9 clearly foretells the life and death of Jesus along with the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. Jesus came to His own people to reveal in human terms the love and character of the Everlasting Father, but they rejected Him. Even though He was rejected, He completely fulfilled His mission to make known the love of God to the world and is the lamb slain from the foundation of the world. The story of Daniel 9 tells us that the events of the cross were not a surprise and did not happen by chance. Jesus was fully aware of the terrible pain He would experience at the hands of wicked men as He chose to demonstrate His character for all in the Universe to see. The tragedy is not just that the innocent Messiah was crucified, but that so many through the ages have rejected His invitation to live lives of integrity.

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