Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 1

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The seventy-weeks prophecy in Daniel 9:24–27 has been one of the most notorious interpretive problem passages in Old Testament studies. As Montgomery put it, "The history of the exegesis of the 70 Weeks is the Dismal Swamp of OT criticism."[1] Early church fathers commonly embraced a messianic interpretation of the passage and sought to prove a chronological computation for the time of Messiah's coming based on this prophecy. This approach has been favored by many conservatives—both premillennial and amillennial—down through the centuries. Advocates of the messianic view differ over the details of interpretation (e.g., the number of times Messiah is referred to in the passage, the termini of the calculations, or how the final seventieth week relates to the first sixty-nine), but they agree that this passage is one of the most astounding references to the Lord Jesus Christ and the time of His first advent.

On the other hand some writers see no reference to Messiah in this passage. This includes most critical scholars, who typically favor a Maccabean fulfillment (i.e., in the second century BC), and Jewish exegetes, who—although differing about various details—tend to see the fulfillment of this passage with the destruction of the temple in AD 70 and/or its aftermath.

The purpose of these two articles is not to provide an exhaustive exegesis of the passage from an evangelical standpoint, as numerous examples of this abound in the literature.[2]

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[1] J. A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1927), 400–401.

[2] Commendable treatments of the seventy-weeks prophecy from a premillennial perspective include Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973); Gleason Archer, "Daniel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 3–157; and Stephen Miller, *Daniel*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994). They each take the terminus a quo as the decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra in 458–457 BC. Other premillennial commentators prefer to take the terminus a quo as the decree of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah in 444 BC. They include John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971) and J. Dwight Pentecost, "Daniel," in *The*

Instead this first article surveys how Daniel 9:24–27 was understood in the early centuries of the church through the early part of the fifth century, and the second article will assess the messianic and nonmesssianic views and how they relate to understanding the word מָשִׁיחַ ("messiah" or "anointed one") in verses 25 and 26.[3]

Pre-Christian Interpretations

The earliest Christian reference to the seventy-weeks prophecy seems to be the rather brief remark found in *The Epistle of Barnabas* (ca. AD 100) in its discussion of the "spiritual temple" in the heart.[4] Otherwise no extended discussion of this prophecy has been found in Christian literature before the late second century AD. Prior to this, however, several Jewish writings include chronological schemes, some of which are based on the passage, and some of which are not.[5] Beckwith has concluded, "The Essenes began *Daniel's* seventy weeks at the return from the Exile, which they dated in Anno Mundi 3430, and that they therefore expected the period of seventy weeks or 490 years to expire in a.m. 3920, which meant for them between 3 BC and AD 2. Consequently their hopes of the coming of the Messiah of Israel (the Son of David) were concentrated on the preceding 7 years, the last week, after the 69 weeks. Their interpretation of the seventy weeks is first

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Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985; reprint, Colorado Springs: Cook, 1996). This latter position is also ably defended by Paul Feinberg, "An Exegetical and Theological Study of Daniel 9:24–27," in *Tradition and Testament*, ed. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 189–220; and Harold H. Hoehner, "Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ; Part VI: Daniel's Seventy Weeks and New Testament Chronology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (January–March 1975): 47–65.

[3] Eleven early church fathers are discussed in this aticle because of their influence or because of the extent of their comments on Daniel 9:24–27. Other figures are not included in this study because their comments were too brief or because they wrote later. Several of the latter are briefly highlighted by Otto Zöckler in his helpful appendix on the history of the exposition of this passage ("Daniel," in *Ezekiel, Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, trans. and ed. James Strong, vol. 7 in *Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* [New York: Scribner's, 1870; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960], 207). An important work not included in this study is the commentary on Daniel by Theodoret of Cyrus (Syria), written about AD 433 (*Theodoret: Commentary on Daniel*, trans. Robert C. Hill [Atlanta: SBL, 2006]).

[4] *The Epistle of Barnabas*, chapter 4, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh, 1867; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 138. The reference is vague and seems to conflate Daniel 9:27 with Haggai 2:10. Yet it does seem to reflect Daniel 9:27: "when the week is completed, the temple of God shall be built in glory in the name of the Lord." Nevertheless it does not indicate any kind of chronological outworking of the seventy weeks.

[5] For a more complete discussion of the evidence see Roger Beckwith, "Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah's Coming in Essene, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Zealot and Early Christian Computation," *Revue de Qumran* 10 (December 1981): 521–42.

found in the *Testament of Levi* and the *Pseudo-Ezekiel Document (4 Q 384–390)*, which probably means that it was worked out before 146 BC."[6]

From a very early time a nonmessianic perspective also existed. Perhaps this was due in part to the Old Greek rendering of Daniel 9:26: καὶ μετὰ ἑπτὰ καὶ ἑβδομήκοντα καὶ ἑξήκοντα δύο ἀποσταθήσεται χρῖσμα καὶ οὐκ ἔσται, καὶ βασιλεία ἐθνῶν φθερεῖ τὴν πόλιν καὶ τό ἅγιον μετὰ τοῦ χριστοῦ ("and after seven and seventy and sixty-two, the anointing [or 'unction,' χρῖσμα] will be taken away and will not be, and the kingdom of the Gentiles will destroy the city and the temple with the anointed one"). It seems that the Septuagint translators were straining to make the text say what they wanted it to say. Once the sum of the figures (i.e., 139) is subtracted from the beginning of the Seleucid era (311–310 BC), the result conveniently falls at 172–71 BC, that is, the approximate year of the murder of the high priest Onias III during the troublesome times of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.[7] Yet this was not the only attempt to connect the seventy-weeks prophecy to the Maccabean era, for another piece of evidence to this effect comes from the Hellenistic Jewish historian Demetrius, preserved by Clement of Alexandria (in his *Stromata* I, XXI, 141).[8]

Therefore, although there is evidence for both a messianic and nonmessianic interpretation of the seventy-weeks prophecy well before the Christian era, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 (along with the failed Bar Kokhba revolt shortly thereafter in AD 132–35) decisively altered the Jewish interpretations of Daniel 9:24–27. From several statements made by Josephus, it seems clear that he viewed the fulfillment of the prophecy in the events leading up to AD 70 rather than in the Maccabean era.[9] He seems to have drawn a connection between the "cutting off" of the anointed high priest (Ananus, who was murdered by the Idumaeans in the temple around AD 66–68) and the destruction of the "city" and "sanctuary" by the Romans. As Beckwith concludes, "Up to a AD.d. 70, the different Pharisaic dates for the coming of the Messiah, and the

[6] Ibid., 523, 525. See also Roger Beckwith, "The Significance of the Calendar for Interpreting Essene Chronology and Eschatology," *Revue de Qumran* 10 (May 1980): 167–202.

[7] On the beginning of the Seleucid era according to the Babylonian calendar see Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 103.

[8] See Beckwith, "Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah's Coming," 528–29.

[9] Although Josephus's comments are somewhat vague, this seems to be the most sensible interpretation of his remarks. See especially *The Jewish Wars* 4.5.2 (318, 323) and 6.2.1 (109–10), in *The Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987). For further discussion see William Adler, "The Apocalyptic Survey of History Adapted by Christians: Daniel's Prophecy of Seventy Weeks," in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, ed. James C. VanderKam and William Adler (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 210–16; Beckwith, "Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah's Coming," 532–36; F. F. Bruce, "Josephus and Daniel," *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 4 (1965): 148–62; and Geza Vermes, "Josephus' Treatment of the Book of Daniel," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 42 (1991): 149–66.

different reckonings of the seventy weeks which they implied, must have existed among the rabbis as three rival interpretations. After AD 70, however, when the Messiah had not come as expected, but the desolation also foretold in Daniel 9 (verses 26–27) had, it was natural to tie the end of the seventy weeks to AD 70 and also to adopt a non-messianic interpretation of the prophecy."[10]

This tendency in Jewish circles to see the seventy weeks fulfilled in Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 is even more strongly affirmed in the Jewish chronological work, *Seder Olam Rabbah*, which, according to tradition, was composed about AD 160 (though it may have been supplemented and edited at a later period). This work provides a chronological record that extends from Adam to the Bar Kokhba revolt of AD 132–135. The significance of *Seder Olam Rabbah* is that the chronology espoused therein became commonly accepted in subsequent Jewish writings, including the Talmud and the consensus of Jewish rabbinical scholars (e.g., Rashi, AD 1040–1105). *Seder Olam Rabbah* says that the seventy weeks were seventy years of exile in Babylon followed by another 420 years until the destruction of the second temple in AD 70.[11] The latter figure of 420 is achieved by assigning 34 years for the domination of the Persians, 180 years to the Greeks, 103 years for the Maccabees, and 103 years for the Herods. The problem, of course, is that these figures are simply unacceptable to modern historians, especially the significantly low figure of 34 years for the Persians. Nevertheless this became the basis for Jewish calculations of the prophecy, though Jewish commentators differed on the details.[12]

IRENAEUS (WRITING CA. AD 180)

Early Christian writers often used the seventy-weeks prophecy for polemical purposes against Jewish unbelief in Jesus as the promised Messiah. For that reason it is strange that Justin Martyr made no reference to Daniel 9 in his apologetic work *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* (ca. AD 153–165), though he made fourteen other references to Daniel. The earliest clear Christian reference to Daniel 9:24–27 is by Irenaeus in his *Against Heresies* (ca. AD 180). In Book 5.25.3 Irenaeus clearly linked the prophecy of the little horn in Daniel 7 to 2 Thessalonians 2, and he indicated that the Antichrist will be in power three and a half years. In 5.25.2 he quoted Matthew 24:15 and stated that this will be fulfilled with the

[10] Beckwith, "Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah's Coming," 536.

[11] *Seder Olam Rabbah*, chap. 28. See Heinrich Guggenheimer, *Seder Olam: The Rabbinic View of Biblical Chronology* (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 1998), 240–46.

[12] For a survey of classical rabbinic interpretations of Daniel 9:24–27 see Hersh Goldwurm, *Daniel: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources*, 2nd ed. (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah, 1980), 259–67. Jewish commentators tended to interpret the cutting off of the מָשִׁיחַ in Daniel 9:26 in one of three ways: (1) the cessation of the sacrifices offered by the *anointed* priesthood; (2) the death of King Agrippa II, who ruled Judah at the time of the temple's destruction; and (3) the death of the high priest, Ananus, at the time of the Jewish revolt leading up to AD 70.

Antichrist literally going into the Jewish temple for the purpose of presenting himself as Christ. In 5.25.4 Irenaeus has an extended discussion about the Antichrist, which culminates in his linking this with Daniel 9:27. "And then he [Daniel] points out the time that his [Antichrist's] tyranny shall last, during which the saints shall be put to flight, they who offer a pure sacrifice unto God: 'And in the midst of the week,' he says, 'the sacrifice and the libation shall be taken away, and the abomination of desolation [shall be brought] into the temple: even unto the consummation of the time shall the desolation be complete.' Now three years and six months constitute the half-week."[13]

Like many early church fathers Irenaeus held to the six-thousand-year view of history (corresponding to the six days of creation with each day representing a thousand years), at the end of which the Lord will return to defeat the Antichrist and establish His kingdom (5.28.3). (According to this theory the seventh day of creation, the Sabbath, will be fulfilled in Christ's millennial kingdom, the true Sabbath). Although Irenaeus did not give any calculation of the seventy weeks, it is clear from his writings that the seventy weeks were not completely fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus Christ, for Irenaeus said that the half a week in verse 27 is the three and a half years when the Antichrist will reign (5.25.4).

Clement of Alexandria (Writing ca. AD 200)

Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–211/216) succeeded Pantaenus as head of Alexandria's Catechetical School. He is one of the first Christian writers to record a computation of the seventy-weeks prophecy, though in only vague detail. In his *Stromata* ("Miscellanies"), book 1, chapter 21, he cited the Theodotionic version of Daniel 9:24–27 and then linked this to Jesus Christ (whom he regards as the "most holy" one, v. 24, nkjv). The completion of the first seven weeks is apparently related to the temple, for Clement stated, "That the temple accordingly was built in seven weeks, is evident; for it is written in Esdras."[14] The sixty-two weeks then lead up to the first advent of Christ, but for Clement the final week encompasses both Nero's erection of an "abomination" in Jerusalem as well as the destruction of the city and temple in Vespasian's reign. Although Clement's interpretation is essentially messianic-historical, his associating the final week with the events of AD 70 is significant. As Adler has noted, "Moreover, by establishing a chronology of the seventy weeks that comprehended both Christ's advent as well as the

[13] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:554.

[14] Clement, *Stromata*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh, 1867; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 329. In the Septuagint "Esdras" (a Greco-Latin variation of the name Ezra) refers to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

destruction of the temple, he is the first to posit what becomes conventional in later interpretations: a presumed hiatus between the first 69 weeks, and the final week."[15]

Jerome, writing some two hundred years later, referred to the interpretation of Clement (indicating that his view must have held some significance for the early church), but Jerome chided Clement for the obvious discrepancy of the numbers stretching from Cyrus to Vespasian.[16] Yet Clement is the first patristic writer to view the seventy weeks as referring to Israel's existence as a nation.

TERTULLIAN (WRITING CA. AD 203)

Tertullian, the famous Latin theologian of Carthage, wrote many works, including *Contra Judaeos* ("Against the Jews"). In chapter 8 of that work he used the seventy-weeks prophecy to argue against the Jews that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy in His first advent (including the Roman capture of Jerusalem in AD 70) and that the Old Covenant had been replaced by the New.[17]

After quoting Daniel 9:24–27 Tertullian presented an explanation of the time periods that differs significantly from almost all other commentators.[18] Instead of three periods for the seventy "weeks" (seven + sixty-two + one), he has only two: one of sixty-two and a half and another of seven and a half.[19] These are translated as "hebdomads," but from the context he clearly meant units of seven years.[20] Tertullian attempted to show how the first period of sixty-two and a half hebdomads (i.e., 437 1/2 years) was fulfilled from the time of Darius (when Daniel received the vision) until the birth of Christ. He listed all the rulers from Darius onward as well as the length of their rule, which he tabulated as being 437 1/2 years. Yet Tertullian mistakenly assumed that the Darius mentioned in Daniel 9:1 (i.e., Darius the Mede) is the same as the Darius under whom the temple was rebuilt; he

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[15] Adler, "The Apocalyptic Survey of History," 225. Irenaeus, writing earlier than Clement, did link Daniel's seventieth week to the time of Antichrist, but he did not fix the terminus ad quem of the seventy weeks with the AD 70 events.

[16] *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel*, trans. Gleason L. Archer Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), 105.

[17] See Tertullian, *Against the Jews*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Edinburgh, 1867; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981).

[18] For further analysis of Tertullian see Geoffrey D. Dunn, "Tertullian and Daniel 9:24–27: A Patristic Interpretation of a Prophetic Time-frame," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 6 (2002): 330–44; and Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[19] It is not known if this view was original with Tertullian or if this was suggested to him by others. It could have possibly come from Jewish sources, for a similar view is found in some Jewish commentators, including Rashi himself (Goldwurm, *Daniel*, 262–63).

[20] The term "hebdomad" is taken from the Greek term used by Theodotion, namely, ἑβδομάδες from the root ἑβδομάς ("week"). This term was used in the Septuagint of Leviticus 25:8 to indicate a seven-year period. The Hebrew has "seven sabbaths of years," meaning forty-nine years.

left out some rulers altogether (e.g., Xerxes); and he gave inaccurate figures for the length of the reigns of some of them. Thus there are far more than 437 1/2 years from Darius until the birth of Christ. He assumed that the "anointing" of the "most holy" refers to Christ, and that with His first coming "vision and prophecy" were "sealed" (i.e., there is no longer a vision or a prophet to announce His coming).

Tertullian suggested that the final seven and a half hebdomads (i.e., fifty-two and a half years) refer to the time from the birth of Christ until the first year of Vespasian when Herod's temple was destroyed, and again he includes a list of rulers and the length of each one's rule. Yet even here his data and calculations are in error, for fifty-two and a half years before AD 70 gives not the year of Christ's birth but the year AD 17. Furthermore Tertullian omitted the reign of Claudius. Nevertheless Tertullian said the ceasing of sacrifices (v. 27) was fulfilled with the destruction of the temple in AD 70.

HIPPOLYTUS (WRITING CA. AD 202–230)

Hippolytus (ca. 170–ca. 236), a disciple of Irenaeus who served as a presbyter of the church at Rome in the early third century, wrote his *Commentary on the Prophet Daniel* in which he clearly espoused a premillennial prophetic outlook (as did Irenaeus), anticipating the millennial kingdom about the year AD 500 (in accord with the six-thousand-year theory of history).[21] This is the first known extant commentary on Daniel. Hippolytus's view of Daniel 9:24–27 is also quoted later by Jerome. Hippolytus equated the beast of Revelation 13 and the "little horn" of Daniel 7 with the future Antichrist, who will rule for three and a half years, while he expected the "ten horns" of Daniel 7 to arise out of the Roman Empire of his day.

[21] The dating of Hippolytus's *Commentary* is uncertain. L. E. Knowles believes it was written about AD 202 ("The Interpretations of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel in the Early Fathers," *Westminster Theological Journal* 7 [May 1945]: 139), though Wilbur M. Smith dates it around AD 230 ("Introduction" in *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel*, 5). Since Christ was believed to have been born in the year 5500 from Adam, there remained five hundred years until the end of the age, the appearance of the Antichrist, and the establishment of Jesus' kingdom. The idea of 5,500 years from Creation until Christ was an allegorical interpretation, this figure being the sum of the dimensions of the Ark of the Covenant (i.e., five and a half cubits), with Christ being the "true Ark."

Hippolytus saw the seventy-weeks prophecy as taking place in three periods.[22] The first seven weeks were the forty-nine years before Joshua, the high priest.[23] This was followed by sixty-two weeks (434 years) from Joshua/Zerubbabel/Ezra until Jesus Christ. (This is a puzzling assertion, since Joshua and Ezra were separated by quite a few years). This sixty-two weeks would then be followed by a "gap" of time before the final "week."[24] During this final week (a future period of seven years in which the Antichrist will come to power), Elijah and Enoch will appear as the two witnesses (Rev. 11). The "anointing of "the most holy" in Daniel 9:24 refers to the anointing of Christ in His first coming (a view common among the early church fathers). The halting of sacrifice mentioned in verse 27 is taken in a spiritual sense rather than in reference to literal sacrifices. Hippolytus wrote, "But when he [the Antichrist] comes, the sacrifice and oblation will be removed, which now are offered to God in every place by the nations."[25] Although Hippolytus said the occurrence of מָשִׁיחַ in verse 25 refers to Joshua, the high priest, at the time of the return from the Babylonian Captivity, he said the second reference to מָשִׁיחַ is to Jesus Christ. Hippolytus followed a messianic-eschatological interpretation (which he probably obtained from Irenaeus), in contrast to the messianic-historical view of Clement, who saw the entire seventy weeks fulfilled in the first century AD As time moved on, the latter view tended to dominate.

Julius Africanus (Writing after AD 232)

Julius Africanus (b. ca. 170; d. after 240), a native of Aelia Capitolina (Jerusalem), wrote his five-volume *Chronographia* ("Chronology") in which he attempted to synchronize sacred and secular history. Like others, he held to the six-thousand-year theory of history and believed that Christ had been born 5,500 years after Creation. Hence he was expecting the return of Christ about AD 500. In his *Chronographia* he devoted an entire treatise to the seventy-weeks passage in Daniel entitled "On the Weeks and This Prophecy." Only portions of this work are extant today.[26] Yet in addition to this Julius

[22] Hippolytus, "Exegetical on Daniel; Part 2," in *The Extant Works and Fragments of Hippolytus*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Edinburgh, 1867; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981). See also Georg N. Bonwetsch and Hans Achelis, eds., *Hippolytus' Commentary to Daniel* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1897); and Hippolytus, *Commentaire sur Daniel*, ed. and trans. M. Lefèvrre and G. Bardy (Paris: Cerf, 1947).

[23] According to Hippolytus, Daniel prophesied in the twenty-first year of the captivity, and there were "seven weeks" (i.e., forty-nine years) remaining in the captivity. The twenty-one plus forty-nine added up to the seventy years of captivity.

[24] Hippolytus, *Commentary on the Prophet Daniel* 2.22.

[25] Ibid.

[26] See A. A. Mosshammer, ed., *Georgii Syncelli Ecloga Chronographica* (Leipzig: Tübner, 1984), 393.23–24. Portions of Africanus's views are also preserved in Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, trans. W. J. Ferar (London: SPCK, 1920), book 8, chap. 2; and Jerome's *Commentary on Daniel*.

explained the seventy-weeks prophecy in other writings that are preserved in volume six of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. His views are cited by both Eusebius and Jerome, which indicates the esteem with which he was regarded.[27]

Julius held to the view that the entire seventy weeks would be completely fulfilled by the time of the first advent of Christ. Of significance is the fact that he rejected the decree of Cyrus as the terminus a quo in favor of the decree of Artaxerxes in the twentieth year of his reign (since the city and its walls were never built in the era following Cyrus's decree). He stated,

> It [the city] remained in this position, accordingly, until Nehemiah and the reign of Artaxerxes, and the 115th year of the sovereignty of the Persians.… And reckoning from that point, we make up seventy weeks to the time of Christ. For if we begin to reckon from any other point, and not from this, the periods will not correspond, and very many odd results will meet us. For if we begin the calculation of the seventy weeks from Cyrus and the first restoration, there will be upwards of one hundred years too many, and there will be a larger number if we begin from the day on which the angel gave the prophecy to Daniel, and a much larger number still if we begin from the commencement of the captivity.[28]

Elsewhere Julius wrote more precisely that his calculations began with the twentieth year of Artaxerxes. "And the beginning of the numbers, that is, of the seventy weeks which make up 490 years, the angel instructs us to take from the going forth of the commandment to answer and to build Jerusalem. And this happened in the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia."[29]

In ancient history, dating was often done on the basis of Olympiads. An Olympiad was a four-year period between the Olympic games. Julius indicates that the twentieth year of Artaxerxes was in the fourth year of the eighty-third Olympiad. According to Finegan

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[27] William Adler and Paul Tuffin suggest the possibility that Africanus may have abandoned his theory about the "lunar years" of Daniel's prophecy (*The Chronography of George Synkellos: A Byzantine Chronicle of Universal History from the Creation* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002]). They state, "See e.g., the *Chron. Pasch*. 307.15–308.9, which ascribes to Africanus a completely different analysis of the 70 year-weeks. According to this interpretation, the first 69 years of the prophecy extended from Ol. 81.4 (AM 5048) up to 14 Tiberius (Ol. 202.1 = AM 5530). The final year-week of the prophecy extended from 15 to 22 Tiberius" (ibid., 470 n. 3). *Chronicon Paschale* was a seventh-century Byzantine universal chronicle of the world. For a partial English translation see *Chronicon Paschale 284–628 AD*, trans. Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989).

[28] Julius Africanus, *The Extant Fragments of the Five Books of the Chronography of Julius Africanus*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh, 1867; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 16.2.

[29] Ibid., 16.1.

this would be Nisan of 444 BC.[30] From this year (the same year in which Artaxerxes permitted the rebuilding of the Jerusalem walls; Neh. 2:1–5), Julius calculated the seventy weeks. Apparently he saw the terminus ad quem as being the time when Christ was baptized and entered into His public ministry, because he based his calculations on Luke 3:1, which mentions the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. Thus Julius argued that there are seventy weeks of years from the decree of Artaxerxes (in his twentieth year) to the beginning of Christ's public ministry in Tiberius Caesar's fifteenth year.[31] One must keep in mind, however, that Julius was not basing his dates on the modern Gregorian calendar but rather on Olympiads. Hence he took the twentieth year of Artaxerxes as the fourth year of the eighty-third Olympiad, and the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar as the second year of the 202nd Olympiad.[32] According to Julius this results in a span of 475 years. He argued, however, that 490 years (seventy weeks) is equivalent to 475 years when viewed according to Hebrew numeration. The Jews, he said, reckoned a year as 354 days rather than 365 1/4 days. The former represents twelve months according to the moon's course, while the latter is based on the solar year. This amounts to a difference of 11 1/4 days per year but is eventually made up by the insertion of extra months at eight-year intervals. "Hence the Greeks and the Jews insert three intercalary months every eight years. For eight times 11 1/4 days makes up 3 months."[33] Thus over a 475-year period, there would be over fifty-nine eight-year periods in which three months would be added, or close to fifteen years in all, and by this means Julius explains how 490 years by Hebrew numeration would be equivalent to nearly 475 solar years.

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[30] Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 92–98. Xerxes, the father of Artaxerxes, died shortly after December 17, 465 (S. H. Horn and L. H. Wood, "The Fifth-Century Jewish Calendar at Elephantine," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 13 [January 1954]: 9). Hence the accession year of Artaxerxes would be December 465 to Nisan 464 BC. His first regnal year as king (according to the Persian system) would be Nisan 464 to Nisan 463, and his twentieth regnal year would then have begun in Nisan 444 BC.

[31] The fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar would be approximately AD 28–29, but there is some debate over this. See I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 133. Most modern scholars reckon that Tiberius's reign began after the death of Augustus on August 19, AD 14 (Chris Scarre, *Chronicle of the Roman Emperors* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1995], 27).

[32] In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* edition (based on a fragment found in Eusebius), Julius refers to the date of Tiberius's sixteenth year, which he gives as the second year of the 202nd Olympiad, but Jerome (in his quotation of Julius) gave it as Tiberius's fifteenth year (see *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel*, 97). Jerome claimed to have been quoting Julius Africanus "verbatim" (ibid., 95). So there is some confusion on whether Julius's calculations were reckoned to Tiberius's fifteenth or sixteenth year. In any case according to Finegan the second year of the 202nd Olympiad would be from July 1, AD 30, until June 30, AD 31 (*Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 47). This does not correspond to the year commonly given for Tiberius's fifteenth year according to modern reckoning (see footnote 31). Finegan concludes that Jesus was baptized and began His public ministry in the fall of AD 29 (ibid., 342).

[33] Julius Africanus, *The Extant Fragments of the Five Books of the Chronology of Julius Africanus*, 6:135.

This explanation of the seventy-weeks prophecy offered by Julius is unique among the church fathers. First, he was the first one to take the terminus a quo as the twentieth year of Artaxerxes.[34] Second, he viewed the terminus ad quem as the fifteenth year of Tiberius, the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. His view, then, is clearly messianic-historical, and he does not attempt to relate the prophecy to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 or suggest how the seventieth week in Daniel 9:27 relates to his view.

ORIGEN (WRITING AFTER AD 215)

Although Origen (ca. 185–ca. 254) did not write a commentary on Daniel, he made many comments on Daniel in his various writings, particularly in volume 10 of his *Stromata* (which Jerome cited), and to a lesser extent in other writings, including *Tractate XXIV* from his commentary on Matthew 24, *De principiis*, *Contra Celsum*, and letters with Julius Africanus. He began to write after the age of thirty, that is, after AD 215.[35] Origen is well known as a textual critic and author of the *Hexapla* and as successor to Clement as head of the Catechetical School in Alexandria. Also he is noted for his allegorizing of Scripture and his hermeneutical approach of a "triple meaning in Scripture."[36]

Origen said that Daniel's seventy-weeks prophecy was fulfilled in Christ. "The weeks of years, also, which the prophet Daniel had predicted, extending to the leadership of Christ, have been fulfilled."[37] Although the details of his calculations are not known (or if he even attempted this), he apparently assumed that the seventy weeks began with Darius the Mede. Jerome (citing the *Stromata*) preserved Origen's opinion on this. "We must quite carefully ascertain the amount of time between the first year of Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, and the advent of Christ, and discover how many years were involved, and

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[34] One cannot know for sure how many followed Julius's view of the twentieth year of Artaxerxes for the terminus a quo. Zöckler reports that Polychronius (d. ca. AD 430) held a modified view of this. "Polychronius … reckons the first seven weeks from Darius Medus to the ninth year of Darius Hystaspia, when Zerubbabel's temple is said to have been completed, the sixty-two weeks from the twentieth year of Artaxerxes to the birth of Christ, and the final week from that date to Titus, while the death of Christ falls in its central point" ("Daniel," 207). Also Theodoret of Cyrus (ca. AD 433) took a similar view (see Robert C. Hill, trans. *Theodoret of Cyrus: Commentary on Daniel* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006], 239–61). However, he counted the sixty-two weeks first and then the seven weeks, with the latter (forty-nine years) leading up to the beginning of Christ's public ministry.

[35] H. Crouzel, "Origen," in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, trans. Adrian Walford (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1992), 2:619.

[36] Origen taught that Scripture has meanings corresponding to the divisions of his trichotomic anthropology: the corporeal or literal meaning, the psychical or moral meaning, and the spiritual or mystical meaning (ibid., 621).

[37] Origen, *De principiis* 4.1.5, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh, 1867; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 353.

what events are said to have occurred during them. Then we must see whether we can fit these data in with the time of the Lord's coming."[38]

The fact that he regarded the reference to מָשִׁיחַ in Daniel 9:25 as Jesus Christ is evident from the following statement: "And according to Daniel, seventy weeks were fulfilled until (the coming of) Christ the Ruler."[39] In *Contra Celsum* he wrote extensively about the future Antichrist, linking 2 Thessalonians 2 to Daniel 8 and Daniel 9:27.[40] "What is stated by Paul in the words quoted from him, where he says, 'so that he sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God,' is in Daniel referred to in the following fashion: 'And on the temple shall be the abomination of desolations, and at the end of the time an end shall be put to the desolation.' "[41]

Knowles, based on the work of Klostermann, claims that Origen espoused a variant interpretation of the "weeks" in his commentary on Matthew,[42] in which Origen based his calculations on "weeks of decades" rather than "weeks of years." According to Knowles, Origen held to 4,900 years from Adam to the end of the last week.[43] Origen also espoused extensive allegorical interpretations of the details. For example he wrote that "the going forth of a word to restore" refers to God's command at Creation, and "to restore and rebuild Jerusalem" refers to Christ's coming. Origen said מָשִׁיחַ in Daniel 9:25 refers to Christ, but in verse 26 it refers to the high priesthood (the "cutting off" of which was seen in the termination of the Hasmonean line by Herod the Great). Origen took the final week (for him, seventy years) as extending from the Day of Pentecost forward seventy years. The "middle of the week" for Origen was represented by the destruction of the temple and the city, and the "prince who is to come" was the Jewish king of that time (apparently Agrippa II). Hence there seems to be a discrepancy between how Origen handled the seventy-weeks prophecy in his *Stromata* and in his commentary on Matthew. Possibly he changed his opinion at some point, but no one can be sure.

Eusebius (Writing ca. AD 314–318)

The church historian Eusebius Pamphili (ca. 260–ca. 340) gave an extended discussion of Daniel 9:20–27 in his *Demonstratio evangelica* (book 8, chap. 2), a work in which he sought to prove Christianity by means of the Old Testament. In addition Jerome in his

[38] Origen, *Stromata*, vol. 10, cited by Jerome in his *Commentary on Daniel*, 105–06.
[39] Origen, *De principiis* 4.1.5.
[40] Origen, *Contra Celsum*, book 2, chap. 49 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4:450–51.
[41] Origen, *Contra Celsum*, book 6, chap. 46, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4:594–95.
[42] Knowles, "The Interpretations of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel in the Early Fathers," 149–50. Cf. Erich Klostermann, in *Origenes Werke* (Berlin: Akademie, 1935), 78–79.
[43] Knowles, "The Interpretations of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel in the Early Fathers," 150.

commentary on Daniel gave a lengthy summary of Eusebius, even pointing out that Eusebius held two different views on the seventy weeks.

In Eusebius's first view he focused on the seven and sixty-two weeks mentioned in Daniel 9:25. Together they represent 483 years, extending, Eusebius said, from the reign of Cyrus to the time Judea became subject to Rome in the first century BC. The term מָשִׁיחַ in verse 25 does not refer to Jesus Christ or any other individual. Instead it refers to "the roll of high priests who governed the people after … the prophecy and the return from Babylon, whom Scripture commonly calls Christs."[44] Each of these high priests is called "Christ the governor," that is, each priest was both high priest (an "anointed one"), and also one who governed the people (since there was no king during this period).

Eusebius said the first seven weeks of years represent the time from the first year of Cyrus until the completion of the temple in the sixth year of the reign of the Persian king Darius. Yet the "first year of Cyrus" was not 539 BC when he conquered Babylon; his first year was approximately 559 BC when he became "king of Anshan" at the time of the death of his father Cambyses. Of course Eusebius did not specify a date in Gregorian calendar terms, but he apparently regarded the time between 559 BC and the sixth year of Darius as being forty-six years on the basis of the statement by the Jews in John 2:20. (Eusebius was obviously confused at this point, since John 2:20 refers to Herod's temple, not to the temple built in the sixth century BC) To this figure of forty-six years Eusebius added three years, based on a statement by Josephus that three more years were spent in completing the surrounding outside buildings, the sum of which is forty-nine years, that is, seven weeks of years. The sixty-two weeks (434 more years) are reckoned from Darius's sixth year, and these ran until Judea was subdued by Rome. The last of the "Christ governors" was Alexander Jannaeus, high priest from 103 to 76 BC.[45] When Jannaeus died, the role of ruler passed to his wife, Salome Alexandra, the queen regnant, while the high priesthood passed to his son, John Hyrcanus II. Thus when Alexander died in 76 BC, the nation entered a time of greater uncertainty, and in the midst of this the Roman general Pompey captured for Rome the regions of Syria and Judea, which Eusebius dated in the first year of the 179th Olympiad (July 1, 64 BC –June 30, 63 BC).[46] According to Eusebius the sixty-two weeks of years came to their conclusion in the aftermath of Alexander Jannaeus when Pompey seized Judea for Rome. Eusebius's calculations are not precise but "close," for

[44] Eusebius, *Demonstratio evangelica* 126. An online version is available at http://www.intratext.com/X/ENG0882.HTM.

[45] Technically the roles of high priest and governor/ruler were reunited for a short period during the time of John Hyrcanus II.

[46] Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 96.

by modern reckoning there are nearly 434 years (sixty-two weeks) from the sixth year of Darius until the death of Alexander Jannaeus in 76 BC (more precisely about 440 years).

In his *Demonstratio evangelica* Eusebius acknowledged that a slightly different view also has merit. In this case rather than beginning the first seven weeks with Cyrus, one could begin with the completion of the temple under the Persian king Darius and calculate sixty-nine weeks of years from that time. Eusebius began with the second year of Darius, which he equated with the sixty-sixth Olympiad (Finegan dates the first year of that Olympiad as July 1, 516 BC –June 30, 515 BC).[47] Eusebius said the sixty-nine weeks concluded in the days of King Herod and the Roman emperor Augustus, using the date of the 186th Olympiad (36–32 BC, according to Finegan).[48] According to Daniel 9:26 the last of the "high priest-governors" was removed after the sixty-two weeks, and this was fulfilled in the death of John Hyrcanus II, who was murdered by Herod in 30 BC. Regarding the destruction of the city and sanctuary, Eusebius saw this as fulfilled in a metaphorical sense with Herod the Great and then literally by the Romans in AD 70.

Eusebius regarded the covenant in the seventieth week as the New Covenant inaugurated by Jesus Christ, and hence the first half of the week was the three and a half years of His public ministry. On His death the veil in the temple was rent in two and the sacrifices were removed (i.e., from God's point of view they were no longer viewed as valid). The second half of the week was supposedly fulfilled in Jesus' postresurrection period. Eusebius said the "abomination" in Daniel 9:27 was fulfilled when Pilate brought the images of Caesar into the temple by night.[49]

Apollinaris of Laodicea (Writing ca. AD 360)

Apollinaris (ca. 310–ca. 390) was bishop of Laodicea in Syria. Virtually nothing remains of his writings, yet his view on Daniel 9:24–27 is retained in Jerome's commentary on Daniel. For Apollinaris the seventy weeks were sequential and uninterrupted, and hence

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[47] Ibid.

[48] This view of the sixty-nine weeks extending from the sixth year of Darius (66th Olympiad) until the time of Herod in the 186th Olympiad is also followed by Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. AD 313–386), who wrote not long after Eusebius. See Cyril of Jerusalem, *The Catechetical Lectures of S. Cyril*, Lecture 12.19, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, vol. 7, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh, 1867; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981). For Finegan's dating see *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 97.

[49] Eusebius relied on Josephus at this point. "So he [Pilate] introduced Caesar's effigies, which were upon the ensigns, and brought them into the city; whereas our law forbids us the very making of images; on which account the former procurators were wont to make their entry into the city with such ensigns as had not those ornaments. Pilate was the first who brought those images to Jerusalem, and set them up there; which was done without the knowledge of the people, because it was done in the nighttime" (*The Antiquities of the Jews* 18.3.1).

there was no gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks. Yet he also believed that the seventieth week would occur at the end of the world. The novelty of his view, then, was that the seventy weeks supposedly defined the time between the two advents of Christ, and hence he was expecting the return of Christ within a hundred years of the time he wrote. He said that in the seventieth week the Antichrist would be manifested, and apparently he anticipated that the Antichrist would literally enter the temple (2 Thess. 2) and issue a decree outlawing the offering of sacrifices.

JULIUS HILARIANUS (WRITING CA. AD 397)

Hilarianus was a Latin chiliast who wrote an important treatise entitled *Chronologia sive Libellus de Mundi Duratione*. In this he attempted to count 5,530 years from Creation to the passion of Christ, and (holding to the six-thousand-year theory) he believed that the millennium would begin about AD 498. Nevertheless according to Knowles, Hilarianus was "the first patristic writer to adopt a non-Messianic interpretation of the Seventy Weeks."[50] Hilarianus espoused that the seventy weeks extended from the first year of Darius to the end of the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the early second century BC. "The reference in vs. 25 to 'the anointed one the prince' is interpreted as a reference to Zerubbabel who was the leader of the first return of the Jews. The last week covers the seven years from the 141st to the 148th year of the Greek rule in Judaea. The event that marks the middle of the week is the pollution of the temple by Antiochus which introduced the abomination of desolation in the form of heathen images in the temple. In this fashion, then, does Hilarianus set the example for the non-Messianic construction of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel."[51]

In advocating this Maccabean view, however, Hilarianus is essentially alone among early church fathers, as virtually all others took some kind of messianic view of the passage.

JEROME (WRITING AD 407)

Jerome (ca. 347–ca. 419) was one of the most noteworthy biblical scholars of the early church, well known as the primary translator and editor of the Latin Vulgate. In AD 407 he wrote a significant commentary on the Book of Daniel.[52] In his discussion of 9:24–27, he declined to offer an interpretation of his own and was content to quote from or

[50] Knowles, "The Interpretations of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel in the Early Fathers," 155.
[51] Ibid., 159.
[52] In addition to the translation of Jerome's commentary by Archer see Jay Braverman, *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel: A Study of Comparative Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Hebrew Bible* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1978).

summarize the positions of several earlier church fathers (Julius, Eusebius, Hippolytus, Apollinaris of Laodicea, Clement, Origen, and Tertullian).

AUGUSTINE (WRITING BETWEEN AD 407 AND 430)

In his 199th Epistle, Augustine (AD 354–430) responded to a question by one Hesychius about the seventy-weeks prophecy. "All of the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks was fulfilled at Christ's first advent; therefore, it is not to be expected that the events will occur again at the second advent."[53] As prolific a writer as Augustine was, he had little to say about this prophecy, but he did commend Jerome's commentary on Daniel.

CONCLUSION

Not until rather late—with Irenaeus about AD 180—is the first substantial discussion of Daniel's seventy-weeks prophecy recorded. Surprisingly Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* (mid-second century AD) made no mention of it, whereas for many of the early church fathers this was regarded as a primary apologetic argument against Jewish unbelief. Also one must keep in mind that the early church fathers had limited access to accurate chronological information and understandably could not always correctly calculate the time periods. And sometimes they confused certain historical figures (e.g., Darius the Persian king for Darius the Mede).

Yet from the literature that is available some vital conclusions can be drawn. All the early church fathers, along with Jewish scholars, interpreted each "week" as a period of seven years and applied this quite literally (though Origen took the final week as seventy years, i.e., a week of decades rather than years). Significantly, of the eleven early church fathers surveyed in this study all but one of them held to some form of messianic interpretation of Daniel's prophecy (the lone exception being Hilarianus who held to a fulfillment in the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the second century BC). Virtually all these saw the first sixty-nine weeks, if not the entire seventy weeks, as fulfilled at Christ's first advent (the exceptions being Hilarianus and Apollinaris, the latter viewing the seventy weeks as the time between the two advents of Christ). One of the other common points of agreement is that the "most holy" in Daniel 9:24 refers to Jesus Christ.

Though most early church fathers took a messianic view of the seventy-weeks prophecy, they tended to favor a messianic-historical position, meaning that the entire seventy weeks was fulfilled at some point in the first century AD. Only a few opted for a messianic/eschatological position in which the seventy weeks would not be completed until some future point beyond the first century, such as the reign of Antichrist or the

[53] Ibid., 160.

second advent of Christ. This latter position is found in Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Apollinaris (all of whom were chiliasts). Related to this, Irenaeus and Hippolytus (along with Julius and Hilarianus) held to the six-thousand-year theory and expected the end of the age and the return of Christ about AD 500.

Despite their agreement about the messianic interpretation in general, they differed greatly in their interpretations of the details. Most of them saw the terminus a quo of the seventy weeks at some point in the sixth century BC, either with Darius or Cyrus (some calculating on the basis of Cyrus's advent as king in 559 BC and others calculating from his conquest of Babylon in 539). As far as can be determined, the earliest church father to adopt a date in the fifth century BC was Julius Africanus, who opted for the twentieth year of Artaxerxes in 444 BC (a relevant point for most dispensational writers today). Others who followed him in this were Polychronius and Theodoret of Cyrus in the fifth century AD Julius's treatment of the seventy-weeks prophecy must have been held in high regard in the early church, as his view is the only one that is repeated by both Eusebius and Jerome.[54]

Regarding the two references to מָשִׁיחַ in Daniel 9:25 and 26, only rarely are these both understood as references to Jesus Christ. Eusebius in fact held that both refer to the line of high priests extending from the sixth to the first century BC. Hippolytus said the one in verse 25 refers to Joshua the high priest at the time of the return from the Exile and the second one refers to Jesus. Origen, on the other hand, said the first one is Jesus and the second one is the high priesthood.

In their mathematical calculations very few church fathers identified the termination of the sixty-nine weeks with the death of Christ, as do most dispensationalists today. Several church fathers (Clement, Julius, Tertullian, and apparently Hippolytus) said the sixty-nine weeks terminated with the birth of Christ or at the commencement of His public ministry. Only one, Julius, attempted to base his calculations on nonsolar years in light of Hebrew numeration and to adjust the total number of years accordingly (from 490 to 475).

Regarding the final week in Daniel 9:27, not all discussed the matter of the sacrifices. Of those who did, some took the sacrifices literally but others (e.g., Hippolytus) took them spiritually, that is, as spiritual sacrifices by believers. Of greater interest was how they saw the relationship of the seventieth week to the sixty-nine weeks. Few discuss whether a hiatus exists btween the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks. Hippolytus, one of the few who did, viewed the final week eschatologically at the time when the Antichrist will

[54] Zöckler remarks that the Venerable Bede (*De temporum ratione*) and Thomas Aquinas (in his commentary on Daniel) take substantially the view of Julius Africanus ("Daniel," 207).

reign. For Clement, the hiatus was in AD 70 when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. Some church fathers understood that the one making the covenant in verse 27 is Christ (with the New Covenant for the church), but many (e.g., Irenaeus) associated verse 27 with the Antichrist (a dominant theme for many early church fathers) and related this verse to Daniel 7, Daniel 8, 2 Thessalonians 2, and Revelation 13.

Thus there was a strong consensus among the early church fathers (a near unanimous position, in fact) that Daniel's seventy-weeks prophecy was fulfilled in Christ, that is, they held a generally messianic interpretation of the passage. On the other hand they varied greatly in how they understood the details and how they based their calculations. As stated earlier, the second article in this series will discuss messianic and nonmessianic views of Daniel's seventy-weeks prophecy.[55]

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[55] Tanner, J. P. (2009). "Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 1." *Bibliotheca Sacra*, *166*, 181–200.