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## **VOLUME 9, ARTICLE 2**

**GEORGE ATHAS,  
IN SEARCH OF THE SEVENTY 'WEEKS'  
OF DANIEL 9**

## IN SEARCH OF THE SEVENTY 'WEEKS' OF DANIEL 9

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### PRELIMINARIES

The Book of Daniel can be a daunting book to deal with because of the many conundrums contained within it. We often come away from its pages with more questions than answers, such as 'Who is Darius the Mede?' or 'Why is there an Aramaic section in the first half of the book?' One conundrum in particular has proved very elusive: the identification of the seventy 'weeks' in Daniel 9. Montgomery's famous comment from 1927 still captures the mood of research on this topic: 'The history of the exegesis of the 70 Weeks is the Dismal Swamp of O.T. criticism.'<sup>1</sup> I propose here to approach this problem by examining and challenging some of the assumptions that have guided past discussions. In my opinion, some of these assumptions have obscured a viable alternative, which not only makes sense of the numerical figures in Daniel 9, but also works well with the narrative framework of the book of Daniel. It is hoped that this new suggestion might show us a way out of the 'Dismal Swamp'.

The strategy I am adopting is far from radical. It involves a synchronic approach that works with the final form of the Book of Daniel. This recognizes that both the narrative and visionary sections of the book form a coherent unity, despite their probable diverse origins. The literary framework of the book, therefore, is of critical importance for any interpretive investigation. Thus, while the Book of Daniel lends itself to gazing through the pages of history for interpretive avenues, we must be led in the first place by the book's own structural markers. I will, therefore, interrogate the book first, before venturing out into the wider historical horizon.

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<sup>1</sup> Montgomery, *Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1927), 400–01.

### THE NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK

The first thing to note within Daniel's narrative framework is the date of Daniel's deportation. In Dan 1:1 Nebuchadnezzar is portrayed as laying siege to Jerusalem in 'the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, King of Judah'. The siege is successful and Daniel is subsequently deported along with other Judeans. While there are numerous discussions about the historical plausibility of such a siege, its historical veracity is not our initial concern. Rather, we are concerned to see this as an event within the storyline of Daniel. The reference to persons in known history means that we can understand the narrative of Daniel as being set in the same era as these persons. As such, we may understand the date of this siege and deportation as occurring in c.606/5 BCE—the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim. This is not the same as saying that there actually was such a siege in c.606/5 BCE. Rather, we are simply saying that the narrative couches this siege in c.606/5 BCE. Therefore, within the narrative confines of the Book of Daniel, the exile of Judah begins in this year.

The second thing to note is the date of Daniel's prayer and vision in chapter 9. According to 9:1, this vision takes place in the first year of Darius the Mede, son of Ahasuerus. Again, numerous historical question marks hang over the person of Darius the Mede, but his historicity (or lack thereof) is not our prime concern. Rather, we are seeking to place him within the narrative framework of Daniel. According to 5:30–31, Darius the Mede brought the Kingdom of Babylon to an end by killing Belshazzar. The fall of Babylon (539 BCE) was a significant moment for the exiles of Judah, for it signaled the overthrow of their conquerors—those who destroyed and plundered Yahweh's temple in Jerusalem (587 BCE). It also signaled the dawning of a realistic hope for repatriation under their new overlords. Indeed, historically we know that this did occur the following year (538 BCE) when Cyrus decreed the repatriation of displaced peoples throughout the empire. Poignantly, therefore, the narrative of Daniel sees the hero considering the possible end of exile in the very year following the fall of Babylon (539/8 BCE). Indeed, the narrative reiterates this date emphatically (9:1, 2).

### IN SEARCH OF THE SEVENTY 'WEEKS': STAGE ONE

We turn now to the consideration of the actual seventy 'weeks'. In chapter 9, Daniel is seen considering Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the duration of Jerusalem's desolation (9:2), which is given as seventy years. Thus, from this point on in the narrative, the number seventy takes on a symbolic significance, standing for the desecration of Jerusalem. The desolation of the Jews as a people is also implied, especially given the concerns of the chapter which associates the exile of the people with Jerusalem's desolation (cf. 9:12, 16, 19, 24). There is also a sense of completeness in the number. That

is, the number seventy points to the duration of desolation by highlighting its end. The narrative itself also suggests this, since the hero, Daniel, has been in exile for virtually the entire narrative, and yet here in chapter 9, in the year following the fall of Babylon, he considers the possibility of that exile coming to an end. Thus, the number seventy highlights a circumscribed desolation for Jerusalem and its (former) residents.

After his vicarious prayer of confession, Daniel is granted a revelation, conveyed to him by ‘the man Gabriel’ (9:21). It is here that Gabriel claims there will be seventy ‘sevens’ or ‘weeks’. Almost all commentators recognize these ‘sevens’ or ‘weeks’ as referring to blocks of seven *years*. Anything else makes very little sense. We will, therefore, proceed with this assumption also.

Gabriel’s revelation contains various chronological markers which are integral to understanding the seventy ‘weeks’. To begin with, the decree to return and rebuild Jerusalem (9:25), which is the first chronological marker, is generally acknowledged as the decree of Cyrus issued in 538 BCE. Given that chapter 9 is couched in the first year of Darius the Mede, one might think that the narrative understands him to be the one who issues the decree of repatriation. Yet, Gabriel’s revelation never names the monarch who issues the decree, this evidently being of little concern to the narrative. The main point, therefore, relates not to the monarch’s identity, but rather to the actual decree of repatriation. This event can be pinpointed to 538 BCE—the year following the fall of Babylon. Thus, in terms of the Daniel narrative, this decree is very imminent.

This reference to the decree of repatriation in 9:25 is the first of many issues in this verse alone. The verse itself in the Masoretic Text reads thus:

וַתֵּדַע וַתִּשְׁפֹּל מִן־מִצָּא דָבָר לְהָשִׁיב וּלְבַנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם עַד־מָשִׁיחַ  
נְגִיד שְׁבַעִים שָׁבָעָה וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁשִׁים וּשְׁנַיִם תְּשׁוּב וְנִבְנְתָה רְחוֹב  
וַחֲרוּץ וּבְצוֹק הַעֵתִים

Know therefore and understand: from the time that the word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the time of an anointed prince, there shall be seven weeks; and for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with streets and moat, but in a troubled time. (NRSV)

As the NRSV translation demonstrates, the reference to a word going out is usually seen as part of a larger clause describing seven ‘weeks’. These seven ‘weeks’ are then viewed as the first portion of the seventy ‘weeks’. Our initial problem comes in trying to identify this first period of seven ‘weeks’. It is a problem well rehearsed. If we take each ‘week’ to represent seven years, then seven ‘weeks’ refers to a period of forty-nine years. If this period begins with the decree of repatriation in 538 BCE (the ‘word’ that goes out), then the end of the period can be identified as 489 BC. However, this leaves the ‘anointed leader’ unidentified, since we know of no particular person who fits this description in 489 BCE. Admittedly, our

knowledge of Judah's history throughout the Persian era is not detailed, such that there may well have been a prominent leader in Jerusalem at this time whose name has not come down to us. However, the verse seems to suggest that the 'anointed leader' here is the first such leader following the decree of repatriation. The difficulty is that we do know of anointed leaders in the post-exilic community of Jerusalem before 489 BCE. The most prominent of these are Sheshbazzar, the priest Joshua ben-Jozadaq, and Zerubbabel the Davidic descendant.

The problem is further exacerbated by the next phrase in the verse, וְשִׁבְעִים וְשָׁנָיִם (‘and sixty-two “weeks”’).

The puzzle here is whether this numerical phrase is part of the clause that precedes it or the clause that follows it. The dichotomy in the various English versions on offer highlights the conundrum.<sup>2</sup> The main culprit in this predicament is the *waw* conjunction at the beginning of the phrase, which allows for either option. Without it, one would have thought it almost impossible to place it with the preceding clause.<sup>3</sup> Yet, if we do read the phrase with the *following* clause, we are still left with the problem just mentioned, namely the identification of an anointed leader at a late date. Yet if we read the phrase as part of the *preceding* clause, we must recalculate the period to one of sixty-nine ‘weeks’ (7 + 62), amounting to 483 years. There are two major difficulties with this, though. Firstly, such a calculation puts the anointed one in 55 BCE—a year in which no notable ‘anointed leaders’ arose within Jerusalem. We cannot really argue from silence for a prominent leader at this time who is simply unknown to us, because our knowledge of Judah at this time (the Roman era) is quite well-informed. Secondly, there is the question as to why the author would separate out this period of sixty-nine ‘weeks’ into two discrete parts of seven ‘weeks’ and sixty-two ‘weeks’. What does such an unusual division achieve, especially if it is simply a period of sixty-nine weeks being conveyed? There seems no satisfactory answer to this question.<sup>4</sup> Thus, while the *waw*

<sup>2</sup> For example, the NIV places the phrase with the preceding clause, while the NRSV places it with the following clause.

<sup>3</sup> That is, without the *waw* conjunction we would have asyndeton and, therefore, be required to read the phrase as part of the clause which follows it.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lucas, *Daniel* (eds. Baker and Wenham; Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 243. According to Collins, the coalescence of the seven ‘weeks’ and sixty-two ‘weeks’ as essentially one period of sixty-nine ‘weeks’ goes back to Theodotion’s text and was perpetuated by Jerome as part of a messianic interpretation; see Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (ed. Cross; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 155. Yet, as McComiskey notes, even some Christian interpreters who knew Theodotion’s text (Θ) separated out the two periods; see McComiskey, ‘The Seventy “Weeks” of Daniel Against the Background of Ancient Near Eastern Literature’, *WTJ* 47 (1985): 18–45. In any case, Christian messianic interpretations of the seventy ‘weeks’ also suffer from considerable imprecision.

conjunction at the beginning of the phrase in question *grammatically* allows for us to place the phrase with the preceding clause, there is no reason *logically* to do so.<sup>5</sup> As such, I advocate placing the phrase within the clause that follows. In this way, the offending *waw* is merely seen to join separate clauses. Indeed, this is a prevailing feature of the narrative at this point that confirms our suspicion.<sup>6</sup>

It seems, then, that we are back to ‘square one’: however we calculate and identify the portions of the seventy ‘weeks’ in the rest of the narrative, we are at an impasse with the first part of it here. Some commentators have recognised this and therefore tried to work through the problem backwards, but with little success. None of the proposed solutions is convincing, unless we allow considerable latitude for inaccuracy in matching the calculations to known events—that is, we think about ‘ballpark’ matches between the numbers and the historical events, rather than specific matches.<sup>7</sup> Such approaches, though, do not really ‘solve’ the problem; they only come close to solving it. The possibility of a better solution still remains.

### EVALUATING ASSUMPTIONS

At this point, we would do well to take stock of the assumptions we take into our calculation of the seventy ‘weeks’. We also need to check whether these assumptions are warranted by the narrative itself. When we do this, we find that there are indeed some unwarranted assumptions which will need correcting. The key assumptions are enumerated below:

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<sup>5</sup> As noted by Collins, the Masoretic Text clearly holds the two periods apart through the use of an *atnah*. Collins also mentions both Christian and Jewish sources that hold the same view, yet which pre-date Jerome. See Collins, *Daniel*, 155.

<sup>6</sup> If we allow the *waw* conjunction here to join the phrase to the preceding clause, then the style of joining successive (but separate) clauses with *waw* conjunction is broken, and a new clause begins at וַיִּשְׁמַע without a *waw* conjunction. Though this is theoretically possible, the style of language here militates against it, as does the *logical* argument mentioned above.

<sup>7</sup> Collins, for example, states: ‘[t]hat Daniel 9 is dated to the first year of the fictional Darius the Mede should dispel any expectation of exactitude in the calculations’ (Collins, *Daniel*, 355). Seow, perhaps following the lead of Baldwin, states: ‘The years are symbolic and, at best, only approximate historical periods. They are probably not literal and precise years’; see Seow, *Daniel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 149; cf. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 171. Similarly, Wallace surmises that the seeming 490 years, which the seventy ‘weeks’ allude to, ‘means merely “approximately five hundred;” see Wallace, *The Message of Daniel: The Lord is King* (Leicester, Eng.; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 164. Both Baldwin and Wallace press this alleged imprecision into the service of a Christian messianic interpretation of the seventy ‘weeks’.

1. We assume that the word שָׁבָעִים (here translated 'weeks') refers to a period of seven *years*. If we took the word purely at face value, we would be dealing with a literal period of seventy *weeks*—that is, about sixteen months. The narrative itself, though, suggests that this is unlikely, since sixteen months hardly seems enough time for the decree of repatriation (9:25), the rebuilding of Jerusalem (9:25), the rise and subsequent death of the anointed one (9:26), the ruin of Jerusalem (9:26), the abomination of desolation (9:27), the destruction of the desolator (9:27), as well as atonement, the establishment of righteousness, and the anointing of the holy of holies (9:24) all to occur. The narrative, therefore, suggests that we are indeed warranted in understanding the term שָׁבָעִים ('weeks') figuratively as a 'weeks' of *years*.<sup>8</sup> This, then, is one assumption worth keeping.
2. We assume that the three discrete portions of the seventy 'weeks' are all contiguous and successive—that is, that the three stated periods of 'weeks' (7 + 62 + 1) follow one after the other to make one continuous period of 490 years (70 × 7 years). However, only at 9:26 does the narrative specifically indicate such a sequence with the word וְאַחֲרָיו ('and after'). This places the death of an anointed one at the end of (or after) the period of sixty-two 'weeks' in a way which suggests that the final period of one 'week' does indeed follow on from the period of sixty-two 'weeks'. Yet, the only thing which demands we see the first period of seven 'weeks' as necessarily preceding the sixty-two 'weeks' is the view which places the sixty-two 'weeks' in the same clause as the seven 'weeks' (9:25). As we have seen, though, there is no logical warrant for this placement, and the narrative style at this point militates against it. There is, therefore, nothing that necessitates placing the seven 'weeks' sequentially before the sixty-two 'weeks'. Admittedly, it seems natural to do so since the narrative deals with the periods in this order. Yet in lieu of an adequate solution with such an arrangement, we must be prepared to abandon it as an assumption. What this means, then, is that the seventy 'weeks' may not be 490 sequential years. In light of our comments above, we must deal firstly with one period of forty-nine years (the seven 'weeks') and secondly with a period of 441 years (the sixty-two 'weeks' together with the final single 'week'). If these two time blocks happen to be chronologically contiguous, then this is a bonus and the narrative is specifically concerned to measure the passing of history in seventy increments (i.e., seventy 'weeks'). If they do not, then we must understand the narrative

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<sup>8</sup> Hence, in my translation, I have used quotation marks to indicate this: 'weeks'.

purely to be assigning meaning to portions of history by connecting them to a prophecy about circumscribed desolation (i.e., Jeremiah's prophecy about the end of exile in Jer 29:10).<sup>9</sup>

3. On occasion it is assumed that the 'anointed leader' of 9:25 is the same figure as the anointed one who is cut off in 9:26.<sup>10</sup> In light of our discussion so far, we must say that if the anointed one in 9:25, who comes to the fore at the end of seven 'weeks' (i.e., forty-nine years), is the very same person as the anointed one who is cut off after sixty-two 'weeks' (i.e., 434 years), then the end of the seven 'weeks' must occur within a lifetime (i.e. the lifetime of this anointed one) before the end of the sixty-two weeks. This would see the seven 'weeks' overlapping with the latter portion of the sixty-two 'weeks', which our argument in point 2 above allows for.

Nonetheless, since there is no definite article attached to the word מָשִׁיחַ in either 9:25 or 9:26, we are free to read the two occurrences as indefinite. This allows us to understand the two verses as referring to two distinct anointed ones. The advantage of this possibility is that we are free to place the seven 'weeks' anywhere that the narrative and history suggest, be it towards the end of the sixty-two 'weeks' or otherwise. Thus, we need not hold onto the assumption that only one anointed leader is being discussed.

4. It is frequently assumed that the 'week' during which the abomination of desolation is set up (9:27) refers to the period which saw the persecution of the Jews under Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the subsequent Maccabean revolt. This is generally regarded as 171–164 BCE, though on closer consideration of the use of intercalary months, should be adjusted to 170–163 BCE.<sup>11</sup> This is not merely wishful thinking or even a

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<sup>9</sup> This is not to deny that the narrative could not have this concern if the two periods of 'weeks' join contiguously into one era of 490 years. Indeed, it is likely that it would. However, if the seventy 'weeks' do represent 490 sequential years, the sequentiality necessarily becomes a feature of the narrative.

<sup>10</sup> As Lucas observes, this assumption is usually held by those adopting a specifically Christian messianic interpretation that identifies the anointed one as a singular figure, namely Jesus. See Lucas, *Daniel*, 244. Baldwin was one prominent exemplar; see Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, 170–71.

<sup>11</sup> Bezalel Bar-Kochva's calendrical calculations seek to harmonise the various dating systems used. His findings demonstrate that an intercalary month was inserted just before the purification of the temple by the Maccabees. On his reckoning, the purification which took place on 25 Kislev (1 Macc 4:52) corresponds to 14 January 163 BCE. See Bar-Kochva, *Judas Maccabaens: The Jewish Struggle Against the Seleucids* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 276–82 (readers should be mindful of the typographic error in Table 3 on p.282, which inadvertently lists this date as '14 January 164 B.C.' [italics mine]).

'ballpark' correspondence, for the match is specific and uncanny. Furthermore, this period of Antiochene persecution is a major concern of the book as a whole (cf. 11.36–39), with Antiochus IV (or his beastly avatar) featuring prominently. As such, viewing the final 'week' (9:27) as the seven years from 170 to 163 BCE is an identification which the book itself suggests quite strongly.

This analysis shows us the assumptions we should take into our investigation, and those we should abandon. In particular, the fragmentation of the seventy 'weeks' into two discrete (and perhaps non-contiguous) blocks provides us with a new lead to follow. Coupled with the fourth assumption above, relating to the final 'week', we now have a new way into the problem. So, let us begin our calculations over again.

### IN SEARCH OF AN ANOINTED ONE

If the final 'week' can be identified as 170–163 BCE, we need to seek the identity of the anointed one who is cut off at the transition from the previous sixty-two 'weeks' to this final 'week' (9:26). The outstanding candidate here is the High Priest Onias III. We will do well to see exactly how he fits into the puzzle. In what follows, I outline an historical scenario for the downfall of Onias III. While we may never fully know the complicated and often hidden machinations of Seleucid politics, the scenario presented below uses known historical facts from the period and tries to 'join the dots' between them, as it were. The uncertainties lie predominantly in trying to determine individuals' motives. However, the developments which are historically verifiable give us some leverage in determining at least some character traits for the individuals involved, and I have tried to use these cues as much as possible.

In 175 BCE, the conservative Onias journeyed from Jerusalem to Antioch to defend both himself and his country from charges of perfidy. This journey began late in the reign of Seleucus IV (cf. 2 Macc 4:5–6). The text of 2 Maccabees does not elucidate whether Onias received his hearing. What it does make clear, though, is that upon Seleucus' assassination in 175 BCE at the hand of Heliodorus and the subsequent accession of Seleucus' brother, Antiochus IV, Onias was stripped of his office. The privilege was instead given to his simoniacal brother, Jason (2 Macc 4:7–10), who subsequently introduced an aggressive pro-Hellenistic policy in Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup> Onias never returned to Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup> Just what happened to him,

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<sup>12</sup> Due to the sum which Jason paid for the high priesthood, Onias III's young son (Onias IV), who should have succeeded him, was overlooked as a replacement for his father. This instigated the decline of normal filial succession to the high priesthood. The office was never the same as a result.

<sup>13</sup> This fact suggests that Onias III arrived in Antioch at about the same time as the assassination of Seleucus IV (175 BCE). Onias' brother

though, has been the subject of much speculation—a fact triggered in part by the tangled testimony of Josephus.<sup>14</sup> The text of 2 Maccabees, however, gives some guidance in the matter. It relates the irony that a relative of Onias and Jason, the notorious Hellenistic zealot, Onias Menelaus, wrested the High Priesthood from Jason through simony (2 Macc 4:23–26) in 172 BCE.<sup>15</sup> When Onias III subsequently uncovered further unscrupulous behaviour, Menelaus put Antiochus IV's deputy, Andronicus, up to murdering Onias outside his place of sanctuary near Antioch (2 Macc 4:33–35). There is, therefore, eminent testimony to the murder of Onias III, such that he fits the Danielic description of an anointed leader who was cut off.

However, a further question remains, namely the date of Onias III's murder. It certainly occurred after Menelaus bought the High Priesthood in 172 BCE. According to 2 Macc 4:27–29, Menelaus was unable to meet the payments for his privilege, and was consequently called to Antioch by the king to answer for it. This fact implies that some space of time must have elapsed for Mene-

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Jason, though, had enough time to take advantage of the new situation through a personal interview with Antiochus IV that brought about Onias' deposition (see 2 Macc 4:7–9).

<sup>14</sup> We can hardly blame Josephus for his confusion, considering the number of prominent figures at this time named Onias or Cleopatra. In *War* 7.423–432, Josephus has Onias [III] fleeing from Antiochus IV and going to Egypt, where he gained permission to build the Yahwistic temple at Leontopolis. However, in *Ant.* 12.237, Josephus states that Jason (here called by his Jewish name, Jesus) became High Priest on the death of his brother Onias III. Yet again, however, in *Ant.* 20.236, Josephus has Onias [IV], son of Onias [III], as the one who builds the temple at Leontopolis. To further complicate things, Josephus immediately before this (*Ant.* 20.235) relates the execution of Onias Menelaus who, like Onias III, was deposed from the high priesthood. And in addition, Josephus relates that the Onias who built the temple gained permission from Ptolemy VI Philometor and Cleopatra [II], who ruled jointly from 163–145 BCE. However, prior to this period (170–164 BCE), Ptolemy VI Philometor co-ruled with his mother, whose name was also Cleopatra [II]. With such doubling and tripling up of names in this era, Josephus' confusion is understandable. We can definitely state that two men named Onias were deprived of the High Priesthood (Onias III and Onias Menelaus), and that at least one of these (Onias Menelaus) was subsequently executed. Furthermore, an 'Onias' did go to Egypt and receive permission from Ptolemy V Philometor and a 'Cleopatra' to build a temple at Leontopolis. Josephus description of this Cleopatra as 'his wife' (Κλεοπάτρα τῆ γυναικὶ αὐτοῦ [*Ant.* 20.236]), is a key unlocking the mystery, in that it allows us to identify her specifically as Cleopatra II (163–145). This date disqualifies Onias III from being the builder of the Leontopolis temple, as the testimony of 2 Maccabees helps confirm (see below).

<sup>15</sup> It must be acknowledged that there is a modicum of doubt about the identification of Onias Menelaus as a relative of Onias III and Jason. This does not, however, affect our consideration of Onias III.

laus' situation to have become apparent. However, by November–December 170 BCE, Antiochus was campaigning against Egypt, so not too much time could have elapsed.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, in order to help finance this campaign, Antiochus would have hankered for Menelaus' money.<sup>17</sup> This puts our focus on 171/70 BCE. When Menelaus came to Antioch at this time, Antiochus himself apparently had to depart for Cilicia to put down unrest there (2 Macc 4:30–31).<sup>18</sup> During his absence, Menelaus bribed the king's deputy, Andronicus. Onias III, however, who was evidently still in Antioch, discovered them both.

It was at this time, during Antiochus' short military excursion to Cilicia, that Onias III was murdered. According to 2 Macc 4:34, Menelaus put Andronicus up to the deed, and Andronicus was later executed by Antiochus for it (2 Macc 4:38). However, according to Diodorus Siculus, Andronicus was executed for the assassination of Seleucus IV's son, a boy named Antiochus, who should have succeeded his father on the throne (*Diod.* 30.7.2–3).<sup>19</sup> On this basis, some have proposed that the murder of Onias is a purely fictional doublet of the murder of the boy Antiochus.<sup>20</sup> Such is, however, not necessarily the case. Firstly, the murder of the boy Antiochus is not in question, and can be dated to August 170 BCE.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, as the son of the previous king, Seleucus IV, the boy had greater claim to the throne than his uncle, Antiochus IV. Thus, as he grew, he would have presented a political thorn in his uncle's side. It is not beyond reason, therefore, to suggest that Antiochus IV himself

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the chronology, see Gera, *Judaea and Mediterranean Politics, 219 to 161 B.C.E.* (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1998), 126f., esp. n.62.

<sup>17</sup> Antiochus seems to have been perennially strapped for cash to finance his exploits. Wolski understands the reason for this to be the Seleucids' loss of their holdings in Asia Minor. Because of this, Antiochus turned to plundering temples, including that of Jerusalem; see Wolski, *The Seleucids: The Decline and Fall of their Empire* (Kraków: Nakładem/Polskiej Akademii Umiejętności, 1999), 97, n.26.

<sup>18</sup> Whether there actually was unrest in Cilicia requiring Antiochus' attention is an interesting question. If there was, it came at a convenient time for Antiochus. If not, Antiochus may have fabricated the unrest to excuse himself from Antioch in order to avoid being implicated in the events that immediately followed.

<sup>19</sup> After Seleucus IV's assassination at the hand of Heliodorus, this boy was placed on the throne as Heliodorus' puppet. However, the boy's uncle, Antiochus IV, took control of the kingdom on his arrival at Antioch. Thus, the son of Seleucus IV is never enumerated amongst the Seleucid monarchs, even though he was technically co-regent from the time his father was killed (175 BCE).

<sup>20</sup> See Gera, *Judaea and Mediterranean Politics*, 129f. for a discussion of this view. It is based partly on the testimony of Josephus. However, as mentioned above, Josephus' accounts are questionable and need to be untangled to make sense of what happened at this time.

<sup>21</sup> See Gera, *Judaea and Mediterranean Politics*, 130.

engineered the boy's murder. This means that Andronicus was merely Antiochus IV's fall guy. Yet, of all people, why was Andronicus, the king's deputy, made the scapegoat? If Andronicus had actually been involved in the murder of Onias, the reason becomes abundantly clear, as it provided Antiochus IV with a pretext: if Andronicus was capable of murdering an innocent priest, he was certainly not beyond murdering the son of Seleucus IV. The boy's demise would have placed Antiochus IV squarely under the spotlight of suspicion. Fortuitously for him, then, Onias' murder during Antiochus' absence from the capital removed that spotlight well away from himself. As such, Andronicus took the fall for both murders.<sup>22</sup> The pieces of the puzzle fit together, therefore, in a way which accounts for the testimony of the sources.

When the order and timing of these events are taken into consideration, it appears that Onias III was murdered at about the same time as the boy Antiochus—that is, August 170 BCE. This also accords well with the events of the following months, which saw Antiochus IV head to Tyre, the charges against Menelaus brought there by representatives of Jerusalem's *gerousia* dropped, and finally Antiochus IV beginning his campaign against Egypt in November-December.

Thus, the murder of Onias fits the chronological indicators of Daniel 9:26 as having occurred at the point of transition between the sixty-two 'weeks' and the final 'week'. Furthermore, Onias appears to have been a conservative, though not a revolutionary zealot, which comports with the portrayal of Jewish faithfulness throughout the book of Daniel. He was also the last stable figure in the line of Zadokite priests.<sup>23</sup> After him, the nature of the high priestly office changed forever.<sup>24</sup> His death, therefore, represents the end of an era in the life of the Jews at this time, helping make further sense of Daniel's portrayal of the end of one era (the sixty-two 'weeks') and the beginning of another (the final 'week'). Indeed, it helps explain why the final sinister 'week' is seen as distinct from the previous sixty-two 'weeks', rather than couched more generically as the last of sixty-three 'weeks'. Onias III, therefore, truly fits the description of an anointed one who is cut off and left with nothing at the cusp of two eras (Dan 9:26). Furthermore, Onias' death came at the hands of foreign overlords (albeit with some pro-Hellenistic Jewish influence), and such foreign domination is a key theme for the book of Daniel.

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<sup>22</sup> It is possible that Andronicus had also been the one to do Antiochus IV's dirty business by committing the boy's murder. This might have given additional impetus for Antiochus to blame him.

<sup>23</sup> While Onias' brother, Jason, was also a Zadokite, his acquisition of the High Priesthood through simony represents the destabilisation of the office.

<sup>24</sup> After Onias III, the high priesthood seems to have fluctuated anywhere between an annually tendered office and a royal title or benefice.

### IN SEARCH OF THE SEVENTY 'WEEKS': STAGE TWO

The calculation of the sixty-two 'weeks' now falls neatly into place with the narrative framework of Daniel. If the final 'week' can be assigned to 170–163 BCE, then the previous sixty-two 'weeks' represent the 434 years ( $62 \times 7$ ) before this, namely 605–171 BCE. As we have seen earlier, 606/5 BCE fits with the first date implied by the narrative framework at Dan 1.1; it is the year that Daniel himself is deported and the exile of Judah (as portrayed in the book of Daniel) begins. For the book as a whole, then, the sixty-two 'weeks' and the final single 'week' represent one long period of exile. This itself is a radical reinterpretation of the notion of exile. While Daniel is contemplating the end of exile in 538 BCE, right before the famous event of repatriation, the revelation delivered to him by Gabriel portrays the exile as enduring well past the date of repatriation. In Daniel, therefore, exile is not merely an absence from the land which can be terminated by repatriation, but rather an enduring period of foreign domination, culminating in the death of a High Priest (Onias III) at the hand of foreign overlords and an intense period of persecution (under Antiochus IV). The termination of exile, then, can only occur with the overthrow of foreign rule—an event which the book of Daniel places firmly in the hands of God. This presupposes, of course, the establishment of a new, independent kingdom of God's people (cf. Dan 7:14–18).

This reinterpretation of exile as the foreign domination of God's people gives us further leverage for understanding the anointed ones mentioned in 9:25–26, and the initial period of seven 'weeks' (49 years). We have already identified the anointed one who is cut off in 9:26 as Onias III (d. 170 BCE), and noted that the 'anointed leader' in 9:25 need not be the same person. In fact, the rise of the anointed leader in 9:25 is mentioned as a landmark event in some way associated with the decree to return and rebuild Jerusalem (538 BCE). It seems a puzzle, though, why this anointed leader would come to prominence seven 'weeks' (i.e. forty-nine years) after the decree of repatriation—that is, sometime around 489 BCE—when we know of earlier prominent leaders. For example, despite his obscure background, we know of Sheshbazzar, who is given the title *הַנְּשִׂיא לְיְהוּדָה* ('the prince of Judah') in Ezra 1.8 and *פְּקִידָה* ('governor' or 'commissar') in Ezra 5:14. It was into his custody that the temple paraphernalia were delivered in c. 538 BCE. Then there are the figures of Zerubbabel and Joshua ben-Jozadaq, both of whom were acknowledged leaders of the post-exilic community in Jerusalem with messianic overtones.<sup>25</sup> In light of these

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<sup>25</sup> Zerubbabel was a Davidic descendant, and Joshua was the High Priest. While the term *קָשִׁיָּה* is not specifically used to describe either of these two men, they are clearly portrayed in equivalent categories in Zech 4:14. Nonetheless, their pedigree alone is sufficient to qualify them as 'anointed' ones. It should be noted that, due to ambiguity in the biblical accounts, there are questions about when exactly Zerubbabel and Joshua

facts, then, this seeming forty-nine-year delay between repatriation and the rise of an anointed leader goes against the grain of known history. To put it another way, drawing attention to an anointed leader of God's people who rises forty-nine years after repatriation is extremely odd when it is the repatriation of 538 BCE itself which is being re-evaluated. It seems far more in keeping with the purpose of the narrative and what we know of history to expect a focus on the time of repatriation. Indeed, this is the tension that many commentators have felt in the past.

The problem lies in the relationship between two temporal phrases in Dan 9:25: Almost all commentators assume that the first phrase, *מִן־מִצָּא דָּבָר לְהָשִׁיב וּלְבָנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם* ('from the issuing of the word to return and rebuild Jerusalem'), forms the first part of a sentence which continues with the second temporal phrase *עַד־מָשִׁיחַ נָגִיד* ('until an anointed leader').<sup>26</sup> This would seem a natural reading in which we have two temporal phrases side by side with a neat structure: *from T<sup>1</sup> until T<sup>2</sup>* (...מִן... עַד). However, it is only force of habit which makes us read the Masoretic Text this way here. Strictly speaking, the syntax does not force us to read the text this way. Indeed, there is another legitimate way to divide the clauses of this verse. Once again, therefore, we encounter an assumption which has shackled our past considerations. If, as I have argued above, the narrative is redefining the notion of exile, then the repatriation of 538 BCE is also undergoing re-evaluation and thereby becomes a focal point. If we separate the two temporal phrases and, instead, place the first one with the two imperatives at the head of the verse, the focus on repatriation is preserved and not diluted. In fact, the decree of repatriation, which is imminent in the narrative, becomes the signal for re-evaluating the notion of exile. Below is the arrangement of the text which I am proposing, along with a translation:

וְיָדַע וְתִשְׁכַּל מִן־מִצָּא דָּבָר לְהָשִׁיב וּלְבָנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם (9.25a)

עַד־מָשִׁיחַ נָגִיד שְׁבַעִים שָׁבָעָה (9.25b)

וְשְׁבַעִים שָׁשִׁים וּשְׁנַיִם תְּשׁוּב וּנְבִנְתָה רְחוּב (9.25c)

וְחָרוֹץ וּבְצוֹק הָעֵתִים

(9:25a) Know and understand from the issuing of the word to return and rebuild Jerusalem:

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took up roles of leadership within the post-exilic community of Jerusalem (was it c. 538 BCE or c. 522 BCE?). Nonetheless, even if a later date may prevent Zerubbabel or Joshua from being the anointed leader of Dan 9:25, Sheshbazzar still stands, adequately filling any vacancy.

<sup>26</sup> For example, Collins, *Daniel*, 346, 55–56; Seow, *Daniel*, 148. We should also note that the phrase *מָשִׁיחַ נָגִיד* is technically not attributive, but rather a phrase containing two nouns (*מָשִׁיחַ* and *נָגִיד*) in apposition (literally 'an anointed one, a leader'). An English attributive phrase, though, conveys the sense in translation.

(9:25b) Until an anointed leader there will be seven 'weeks'.

(9:25c) In sixty-two 'weeks' you will have returned with street and conduit<sup>27</sup> rebuilt, but with the anguish of the times.

This reading has some notable features and distinct advantages over past readings:

1. The syntax is in no way forced. While it appears unusual, this is only a product of old readings shaping our syntactical expectations. In other words, it is only unfamiliarity with this reading which makes it sound unusual when, in fact, it is syntactically coherent.
2. The second (9:25b) and third (9:25c) lines are thematically similar in focusing upon the end of a period of time.
3. The second and third lines have a chiasmic structure (A B B' A').
4. Traditionally, the phrase **וְנִבְנְתָה תְּשׁוּבָה** in the third clause has been translated 'it will again be rebuilt', with the verb **תְּשׁוּבָה** functioning essentially as an adverb ('again') and with Jerusalem as its subject. While such a translation of **שׁוּב** is legitimate, here it blurs the symmetry with the cognate phrase **לְהָשִׁיב וְלִבְנוֹת** ('to return and rebuild') in the first clause. The reading I suggest preserves a much closer symmetry between these two phrases by translating the word **תְּשׁוּבָה** as a second masculine singular with a human subject ('you will have returned'), rather than as a third feminine singular of adverbial force with the city Jerusalem as its referent ('it will again...'). This way, Daniel is being addressed in such a way that he is identified with the Jewish nation almost as its representative. This is precisely the attitude which Daniel himself takes throughout his penitential prayer earlier in the chapter (Dan 9:4–19). Thus, this reading not only preserves the symmetry between the two phrases in question, it also accords well with the characterisation within the chapter.
5. Within the narrative, the issuing of the word to return and rebuild Jerusalem (i.e., the decree of repatriation in 538 BCE) proleptically becomes the catalyst for the calculations of the

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<sup>27</sup> The exact translation of **וְתָרוּץ** has been debated since it is a *bapax legomenon* in the Hebrew Bible. Extra-biblical sources have, therefore, been brought to bear upon the translation. The closest cognate comes from the Copper Scroll (3Q15) where the twenty-sixth cache is described with reference to **הַחֲרוּץ שֶׁל שְׁלֹמוֹ**, which appears to be a reference to 'Solomon's Canal'; see Wise, Abegg and Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 194. It seems, therefore, to refer to a man-made construction which specifically held or conveyed water. In any case, the phrase **וְתָרוּץ וְתָרוּץ** has the feel of a merismus or hendiadys which portrays a city in a fully built state.

seventy ‘weeks’ which follow. As an event, therefore, it represents a notable ‘line in the sand’, but whose significance is re-evaluated by the subsequent periodisation of history into seventy ‘weeks’. Early readers of Daniel would no doubt have been aware of how salient this event was (hence the author’s compulsion to re-evaluate it in light of later events). Indeed, it hangs imminently over the narrative in this chapter.

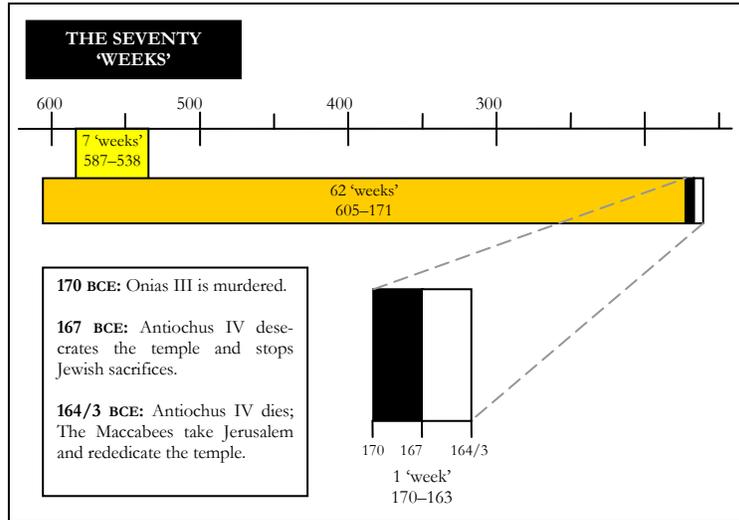
6. The anointed leader is fronted in the second line (9:25b) in a way that is suggestive of a list. The anointed leader is also familiar to readers and provides a known reference point, namely the re-establishment of local leadership at the time of repatriation (538 BCE). This is in keeping with the focus of the narrative. Candidates for the anointed leader, therefore, are Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, and Joshua ben-Jozadaq.
7. With the rise of the anointed leader in 538 BCE, the beginning of the seven ‘weeks’ can be placed forty-nine years earlier at 587 BCE. This is notable as the year that the Babylonians destroyed the Jerusalem temple and that Judah lost its statehood. This seven ‘week’ period, therefore, represents the forty-nine-year hiatus in anointed leadership (Davidic and/or priestly) within Jerusalem. Significantly, Jerusalem features prominently throughout this chapter of Daniel, being mentioned a total of six times (9:2, 7, 12, 16 [*bis*], 25) with specific attention drawn to its destruction, its period of desolation, and its reconstruction. The reading I am suggesting for 9:25 is in perfect keeping with the themes of the narrative at this point.
8. While this reading means that this initial seven ‘weeks’ is not chronologically succeeded by the sixty-two ‘weeks’, the reason for this fracturing becomes abundantly clear: the author of Daniel is constrained by both the 70-year schema of Jeremiah and the course of actual history. While 587 BCE is the more natural point from which to enumerate the desolation of Jerusalem and its residents, it does not afford the neat use of a numerical schema centred on the number 70. The gap between 587 BCE and the beginning of the last ‘week’ in 170 BCE is only 417 years, and this does not divide neatly into a period of ‘weeks’.<sup>28</sup> As such, the author has had to stagger the time periods to achieve the desired fit with the number 70. In doing so, the author has also had to reach back to 605 BCE in order to fill out the full seventy ‘weeks’. Yet, through this technique, the author has managed to squeeze the seventy ‘weeks’ into a period of 441 actual years (605–163 BCE).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> These 417 years would amount to approximately 59.6 weeks—a somewhat messy number.

<sup>29</sup> Numerically this period seems to be 442 years. However, the end of this period, which is marked by the rededication of the temple, occurred on 14 January 163 BCE (see n.12 above), though it is usually given as 25 December 164 BCE by most scholars. It would be illegitimate, therefore,

9. As already implied, this reading makes sense of the opening date in Dan 1:1 (the third year of Jehoiakim = 605 BCE). The following diagram seeks to illustrate visually how this schema works:



**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this new understanding of the seventy 'weeks' is able to make sense of both the literary features of the book of Daniel, as well as provide fairly precise dates for the calculation of the seventy 'weeks'. While it may leave us feeling that the author of Daniel has performed some mathematical and historical gymnastics, it elucidates one of the key concerns of the book of Daniel, which is to provide a theological comment on the foreign rule of the Jewish people. The author evidently felt that the repatriation of Jews under foreign overlords was not theologically satisfying, for it fell short of a true restoration which entailed the end of foreign rule over the Jews. Repatriation to the land, therefore, was not enough. However, the author was also not a revolutionary zealot, but one who believed that the overthrow of foreign rule could only be achieved by an act of God. In other words, the author possessed a truly apocalyptic mindset. As such, the author seems to have been averse to taking up arms and advocated instead faithfulness to Jewish customs despite the personal cost this might entail (cf. Dan 3; 6). Indeed, in Daniel 9, Onias III, the anointed High Priest, seems to be the salient example of such a stance. The author of Daniel preferred quiet resistance until the time when, inevitably, God would act decisively for the faithful among his people.

A final critical conclusion regarding the (diachronic) transmission history of Daniel is also warranted. The schema of seventy

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to count 163 BCE as a full year in our calculations.

‘weeks’, which the author of Daniel employed, was integral in the formation of the narrative framework of the book. This schema is precisely the reason why the narrative begins in 605 BCE. Chapter 1, in other words, is ‘genetically’ (and therefore diachronically) dependent on chapter 9. As such, the chronology which framed the entire narrative could not have been composed before chapter 9. Furthermore, it has been generally accepted, but by no means proved beyond doubt, that the narrative tales in the first half of the book had an independent transmission history which predated the visions related in the second half of the book. Other factors also stand in support of this hypothesis: (i) there are notable discrepancies between the Masoretic Text and the Old Greek version of chapters 4–6, which might be attributed to freely-adaptable, floating traditions;<sup>30</sup> (ii) chapters 2–7 are composed in Aramaic, while the rest of the book is in Hebrew; and (iii) there are other Daniel traditions, including the Additions to Daniel (*Bel and the Dragon*, *Susannah*, and *The Prayer of the Three*), and material among the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q243–245),<sup>31</sup> suggesting a broad corpus of Daniel traditions. It has further been surmised that chapter 1 was a late addition, appended to the beginning of the book of Daniel to function as an introduction to the rest of the material. The ‘genetic’ connection we have demonstrated between chapter 9 and the opening framework of the book suggests that this is probably the case. Thus, all the indications are that chapter 1 goes with the visionary sections of the book in terms of diachronic development. In other words, it does appear as though a series of Daniel traditions were captured within the canonical book of Daniel and given an introduction (chapter 1) and visionary section (chapter 7–12) composed in Hebrew.<sup>32</sup>

The theory I have proposed here is not what one would call intuitive. However, the nature of the seventy ‘weeks’ schema is itself not exactly intuitive either. In any case, I believe that the theory I have put forward here offers us a viable alternative which achieves greater precision than earlier theories. It is also in greater accord with the narrative and theological concerns of the larger

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<sup>30</sup> See Collins, *Daniel*, 4–7 for a brief discussion on the Old Greek of Daniel.

<sup>31</sup> This material, also known as *The Vision of Daniel*, is highly fragmentary, but from the extant portions we may discern a narrative in which Daniel relates both past history as well as future (predicted) history to Belshazzar. Other material from Qumran might also be relevant to the Daniel traditions, such as *The Prayer of Nabonidus* (4Q242) and *The Vision of the Son of God* (4Q246), but due to the fragmentary nature of the extant texts we cannot be completely sure.

<sup>32</sup> Kratz argues that chapter 7 was added to the narrative tales at an earlier stage than chapter 8–12; see Kratz, ‘The Visions of Daniel’, in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception* eds. Collins and Flint; Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2002. This has to be entertained as a serious possibility.

book, and even provides us with a window by which to glimpse something of Daniel's transmission history.

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