

THE BEGINNING POINT FOR THE 490 YEARS

(DANIEL 9 – PART 4)

“Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times” (Daniel 9:25).

“Know therefore and understand,” (vs 25)

In the light of fulfilling the everlasting covenant with God’s people, Gabriel asked Daniel to “know the facts I’m going to tell you” and “make sure you understand what they mean.” Bottom line? Know the **purpose** God has in giving this time-limited prophecy.

This is **not** a casual teacher–student imperative! Daniel had fainted in Gabriel’s last timing message (8:27). Eternal issues for God’s people are being entrusted to this prophet. Just a few minutes ago he had said: *“I am come to shew thee”* – therefore understand the matter and grasp the meaning of “the” *mareh* vision (9:23)! That vision is the story of how God’s people will be delivered.

The events driving this timing vision now proceed. The 2300-year prophecy preceded this one, identified as part of this same *mareh* message. That message was couched in “sacred cycles” – “evening–morning,” which depicts the annual Day of Atonement. Here, the 70 weeks of years have a legal point of onset. Thus, a secular–spiritual time frame is being jointly developed.

Ezra will relate to this legal point also – a religious–secular time. *“I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee.... And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment”* (Ezra 7:13, 23). See Appendix II. A copy of the decree letter was carried by Ezra in this journey (Ezra 7:11).

“that from the going forth of the commandment” (vs 25)

“Going forth” *mosa (mowtsa)* refers to “issuing” of a command or decree. This is future to this meeting with Gabriel. The word “from” means that it begins at some point in time and covers a defined period. That will be revealed shortly by Gabriel as a 483-year expanse.

Since the 2300-year period – annual “atonement cycles” – is also a *mareh* vision, one can now conclude that it too begins at that decree (in Daniel 8:14 no beginning or ending point was given). There, Christ’s response to Gabriel’s *“until when” (admatay)* question clearly shows that one must know when that period begins because the time when the Daniel 8 prophecies will occur is at or after its end.

Thus, the decree must be given in the fall, at a time that would coincide with or come *immediately* after the Day of Atonement (Tishri 10). *Atonement* represents *restoration*, cleansing, a beginning again, when holiness is restored. The counsel given by Gabriel to Israel

were steps of “corrective action” to “*bring in everlasting righteousness*” – a theme also of restoration. The prophecies focus on spiritual restoration. That is easily overlooked. That is the theme and overriding purpose of this prophecy.

A question that continues to provoke heavy debate: “Which decree?” And “By whom?” The end of the 70-year captivity is in sight. Would it occur when Babylon was captured by the Persian Empire in 539 B.C.?¹ The Jewish people still had three and a half years to go as near as the records can be ascertained to the end of that 70-year captivity, which ended when Cyrus became king in 526 B.C.² No decree was made then related to the Jews. But at the end of the 70 years, one would be anticipated.

Focusing on Cyrus

The Bible had made many predictions regarding Cyrus over one hundred years before he was born. He was decreed by God as “*my shepherd*” (Isaiah 46:11) to set the captives free (Isaiah 45:13) and even called “righteous” (Isaiah 45:13).

Daniel was told that the “*decree*” was to “*restore and to build Jerusalem ... the streets shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times*” (Daniel 9:25). God also through Isaiah had noted: “*who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; **he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt,"** and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."*” ... “*I will raise up Cyrus ... in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. **He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty.***” (Isaiah 44:28, 45:13 – NIV).

If that decree was what God intended, the 483 years to Messiah the Prince would have brought that point to 53 B.C. – well known to fall shy of any Messianic fulfillment. Thus, it could not be what Gabriel was alluding to. There must be another meaning to what will occur!

Fulfillment of Cyrus’ decree was hampered. It was in his first year that he recognized that he would be fulfilling divine prophecy spoken nearly 150 years before. It was then that his decree went forth for the captives to return. The Samaritans quickly began to thwart God’s purposes. But God said that they would return and that Cyrus would rebuild the temple **and** the city!

Satan knew that that was a transitional point in Jewish history and in prophetic issues. That is why there was a dramatic delay in Gabriel’s later arrival to another of Daniel’s special petitions noted in Daniel 10. Satan was trying to discourage Cyrus from continued support of those exiles. Gabriel was working with Cyrus to bring the 70 years of captivity to an end and reestablished God’s people. Finally, Jesus Himself, Michael, came to end that battle (Daniel 10:13).

Ezra notes that **this** decree came in the first regnal year of Cyrus’ reign: “*Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and [put it] also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD*

¹ Nabonidus Chronicle pp. 15-16. Cyrus’ Cylinder, British Museum

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/me/c/cyrus_cylinder.aspx

² Herodotus, *The Histories Book I*, 440 B.C., translated by George Rawlingson, Flavios Josephus (Antiquity of the Jews). <http://sacred-texts.com/jud/josephus/index.htm#aoj>

God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:1-4).

Though it is not the purpose of this article to decipher the complex issues regarding the accession and regnal years of the Babylonian and Medo-Persian kings (see [Appendix II](#) for more details), the year is best seen as 536 B.C.³ Was that **the** decree that Gabriel was referring to? Though Cyrus was propheticallly to bring in the restoration of temple and city, the initial decree that Ezra noted only related to the temple.

“The year that Cyrus succeeded Darius the Mede to the throne of Medo-Persia marked the completion of seventy years since the first company of Hebrews had been carried captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel, who was familiar with the prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah regarding the duration of the captivity, and with the prophecies of Isaiah regarding the restoration by decree of Cyrus, was still living, and was occupying a position of leading responsibility in the Medo-Persian court. His faith in these prophecies led him to plead with God in behalf of his people. And now, when the time came for the temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt, God moved upon Cyrus as his agent to discern the prophecies concerning himself, and to grant the Jewish people their liberty. And furthermore, Cyrus furnished them the necessary facilities for rebuilding the temple of the Lord.”⁴

“During the earlier years of the restoration of the Jews from Babylon, the Samaritans were untiring in their opposition. They ‘weakened the hands of the people in Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius.’ By their false reports they aroused suspicions in minds easily led to suspect. At times, the rulers in authority seemed to be influenced to work against the purposes of God. But for many years the influences for evil were held in check, and the people of God had liberty to continue their work.

“Throughout these years, Satan was striving to influence the highest powers of the kingdom of Medo-Persia to show disfavor to God's people. It was Satan who prompted the Samaritans to persevere in their opposition. But angels of God were working in behalf of the returned exiles, and all heaven was intensely interested in the controversy. In the tenth chapter of Daniel is given a glimpse of this mighty struggle waged for many years between the forces for good and the forces for evil.”⁵

Looking at Artaxerxes

The year of 458 B.C. was when Artaxerxes I made another remarkable restoration decree ([Appendix II](#)). This is an amazing legal directive. Though quoted often as “the” decree that fulfills the restoration of Jerusalem, its streets and walls, there is not one reference in that decree (quoted in Ezra 7:12-26) to repairing, rebuilding or restoring physical assets!! Yet, it is

³ www.biblestudents.net/library/firstyearofcyrus.pdf

⁴ White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, March 28, 1907.

⁵ White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, December 5, 1907.

“concluded” by many that this decree fulfills the directive. It is the decree – but for an entirely different reason.

Since the 70 weeks of years and the 2300 evening–morning prophecies are based upon luni-solar cycles, Artaxerxes I’s decree does fit the prophetic events of the rest of Daniel 9 (more on this later as we unfold this study). That would put the emergence of Messiah the Prince – felt to be when He was anointed by the Holy Spirit and affirmed by His Father – at the Jordan baptism, near the historic time. But what do we do about the “decree to **build**”?

A second decree of Artaxerxes I was issued to Nehemiah (445–444 B.C.). This is a popular view among evangelicals (i.e., Walvoord, Whitcomb, Sir Robert Anderson). It was not a formal decree but was a letter of “permission” for Nehemiah (2:7) to visit Palestine. The mission was actually to repair the broken walls of Jerusalem and the gates. But Nehemiah did say that Jerusalem lieth in waste and the gates are burned with fire (2:17; cf. 2:3) – and in his request to the king noted “send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers sepulchres, that I may build it” (2:5). But the actual work that was done repaired the walls and gates – and all was completed in 52 days (6:15)!

If 445–444 B.C. was the period, then the 483 years would go to 39 A.D. – well beyond the time of Christ.⁶ To “accommodate” that dilemma, Anderson argued that the years were 360 days and not luni-solar as this prophecy clearly stated (70 Sabbatical cycles). There are some prophecies calling on such short “years” – but not here. That is totally out of context.

The question that must be addressed is “What decree?” and “When?” since the prophecies which follow have distinct time periods that must be analyzed! But even more important is not simply the drawing on of a historic “retrospective” conclusion from our day – but to inquire “What could/would the Jewish people observe as a decree (*dabar*) that would permit them to begin “counting the years”? (see [Appendix III](#) for background).

Based upon this diagram from [Appendix II](#), we begin further analysis.

⁶ Miller, *Op. cit.*, p. 265.

Tishri 1 through Elul 29 = Solar/Civil Year Calendar

Gregorian Years

Regnal Years for Artaxerxes I

465*– 464 (Elul 29)	Artaxerxes I's ascension year (6½ months)
464 – 463	1 Tishri 1 – Elul 29
463 – 462	2 Tishri 1 – Elul 29
462 – 461	3 Tishri 1 – Elul 29
461 – 460	4 Tishri 1 – Elul 29
460 – 459	5 Tishri 1 – Elul 29
459 – 458	6 Tishri 1 – Elul 29
458 – 457	7 Tishri 1 – Elul 29

Nissan 1, 457 B.C. – Ezra left Babylon

Av 1, 457 – Ezra arrived in Jerusalem

*(December 17 – Xerxes murdered)

The “beginning point” is noted in 9:25 to relate to “restore” and “build” Jerusalem. The “walls” and “streets” are added at the end almost as an afterthought. Since there are conflicting expressions regarding when these were **physically restored**, a very important consideration must be raised: Since so much of Daniel 8–12 is based on metaphors and symbols, is it possible that the words “Jerusalem, walls and streets” are also spiritual representations? This question is of heightened interest in light of God already noting that Cyrus would deal with the physical city.

The answer is *yes*. But to convincingly demonstrate *why*, we must look elsewhere. This brings us first to Daniel 11. This prophecy was given in the third year of Cyrus' reign (representing the time of Darius the Mede and Cyrus, felt to be ~536 B.C.) (Daniel 11:1). His decree to release God's people was in his first year or 536 B.C. (Ezra 1:1-4).

Focusing on the Persian Kings

Daniel 11:2-20 are the key kings that arise **during** the 490 years, through the “raiser of taxes” (Daniel 11:20 – Caesar Augustus)! The prophetic metaphors of Daniel 8 suggest that there is one or more Medo-Persian king(s) (Daniel 8:20). Moving to Daniel 11:2, we find that there are “four kings” that God draws our attention to.

*“And now will I show thee the truth. Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the **fourth** shall be far richer than they all: and by his strength through his riches he shall stir up all against the realm of Grecia”* (Daniel 11:2).

- Cyrus was king – when this was written.
- Daniel is told there will be:
 - Three Persian kings to first pay attention to.
 - Then a fourth rich Persian king will arise and stir up all against the realm of Grecia. [Note: Greece was not an empire at this time. But the Athenians (later, Greeks) were fighting Medo-Persia in many battles, beginning with the reign of Xerxes.]

Historically, there were 13 Persian kings until Alexander the Great (the “kings” – 8:21) comes and the Grecian Empire rules the world. This presents several problems. One – Which four kings is Gabriel referring to? The last of the four appears to be significant (see below). Two – When this prophecy was given (536 B.C.), Greece wasn’t even a kingdom.

- Leopard-like beast (Daniel 7:6) – future kingdom of Greece
- Rough he-goat, depicting Greece (Daniel 8:5, 21) – metaphor for Satan

Not until Alexander the Great’s father, Philip of Maudon, would Greece’s early stage commence (359-336 B.C.). Yet, God is revealing that this area is a historical issue relative to Medo-Persia!

Suddenly – as we begin to see the great purpose of the 70-year **and** 490-year prophecies, Cyrus must be the **first king** since his decree brought the 70-year prophecy to its end and set the stage to begin the second.

Which kings are in that list of Daniel 11:2? Bypassing the many theories, there **are** four Persian kings **noted in the Bible** of prophetic significance (Ezra 4:5-7) (God says that these are the ones to know.):

- Cyrus (560-530 B.C.)
- Darius I (522-486 B.C.)
- Xerxes (486-465 B.C.)
- Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.)

Xerxes is the Ahasuerus of Queen Esther’s fame. He did give a decree of destruction, but later of restoration under the guidance of Mordecai who took Haman’s place. The latter secured the Jewish people from their enemies but was not a decree of spiritual revival/covenant renewal – restoration of “Jerusalem.”

Artaxerxes I was different. Though frequently alluded to as the king who decreed that the physical city of Jerusalem, its walls and streets to be rebuilt, his order is 100% void of such a command! It is a decree of covenant restoration. It came in Artaxerxes I’s seventh year as recorded in Ezra 7. By the context of Daniel 9, its spiritual restoration setting, and in an amazing background of the spiritual metaphors of Daniel 8, this would be “the” fourth king to fulfill the decree! Historically, he is the king that undermined the “Greeks,” bringing to an end over 50 years of Greek (Athenian) – Persian wars. How? By bribing, through Persian riches, Greek enemies to subvert Athenian power.⁷ He must be the king of the decree!

Artaxerxes I is the king of prophetic focus – the fourth king. Since his concern is spiritual, we must discover a spiritual meaning to the “asset” symbols of verse 25 based on Ezra’s context.

⁷ Dandamaev, M. A.; *A Political History of the Achaemenid Empire* (1989) (translated by W. J. Vogelsang).

Restoring Jerusalem and Its Parts

“to restore and to build Jerusalem ... the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times” (vs 25)

In Nebuchadnezzar’s third and final attack on Jerusalem, devastation of the city and temple was profound. Jeremiah had prophesied, “*And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.*” (Jeremiah 25:11; cf. 29:10). Cyrus would give the decree to return to their homeland in 536 B.C. (70 years after the desolating attacks began). Here, three and a half years earlier, Gabriel (at the time of Darius the Mede – 539 B.C.) notes that the 490 years would begin when a decree went forth to “restore Jerusalem” and then build the “walls” and “streets.”

The record of Cyrus’ decree is to rebuild the temple, “the house of the Lord” (Ezra 1:2-4). From Ezra 1–7 and Haggai 1:4 and 14, it can be ascertained that rebuilding of the city was moving forward at the same time.⁸ That actually fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 44:28 and 45:13. That was a divine imperative from God directly related to Cyrus. Is that what the 70 weeks of years is predicated on? When this Daniel 9 prophecy was given, that initial decree still lay ahead three and a half years. Josephus concluded that this is the decree.⁹

If Cyrus’ decree was the onset of the 490 years, God would have mentioned his name since he was about to assume power. He was already a familiar name in the Canon and living at the time of Daniel! This whole issue forces us to step back and reassess the dynamics of Daniel 9.

The captivity was related to idol worship and more pointedly to a defiance of the Sabbatical year, the Shemita (II Chronicles 36:20-21). The Shemita was more than a Jewish ritual or divine mandated tradition (see [Appendix IV](#)). It was a sacred Sabbath year when all of Israel “played heaven.” It was a time when all of God’s people related with each other and with God as though the everlasting covenant had been fulfilled “This is what redemption will really be like” is the Sabbatical message. This is what God has ahead for everyone loyal to Him.

The Jewish nation defied that Sabbatical year and, in turn, through idolatry mocked God and His pastoral shepherding over that “flock.” In mercy, almost beyond comprehension, God is giving them 70 more chances to “play heaven.” This would be part of their steps towards holiness. **Thus, the beginning of that restoration must have deeply spiritual directives.** There is one decree and one only that matches that setting! It is recorded in Ezra 7. And in amazing language from a secular leader, it orders the Jewish people to get back to theocratic life and worship and reestablish their loyalties to God. It is a covenant restoration decree from King Artaxerxes II! There is nothing in that decree about rebuilding the physical city Jerusalem.

Verse 25 begins with an exhortation for Daniel to “know and understand.” This was not part of the sealed vision. That sets it aside from the previous chapter.¹⁰

Daniel prays – Gabriel responds: “this is what you have to do” (vs 24a); then “if you do that, this is what will occur” (vs 24b). Now God sets that purpose in a time setting – but as He does, a great spiritual objective deepens. Thus – within the compassionate restoration theme, God is

⁸ Steinman, *Op. cit.*, p. 470.

⁹ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 11:1-18.

¹⁰ Goldingay, *Op. cit.*, p. 260.

warning His people that His mercy has a timing limit. “Understand and perceive.” What is predicted in verse 24 will be completed in verse 25-27 in that framework of time. It becomes a prophecy of the final phase of redemption.

Since the 70 weeks of years is for “your people” and “your holy city,” a fascinating characterization of spiritual deliverance is portrayed.

To address sin (vs 24)	People	Holy city	
Restore and build (vs 25)		Jerusalem	Streets/walls

The word “Jerusalem” in prophecy represents God’s people. It can be when in apostasy (Isaiah 1:21, Matthew 23:27) or fully restored as Christ’s bride (Revelation 19:7, 9; 21:9-10).

There are other illustrations of a “holy people.” John was told that the “bride” reached such a point in her spiritual experience that she “was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints” (Revelation 19:8; cf. Isaiah 61:10). That is exactly what Gabriel is telling God’s people through Daniel. In fact, the word for “restore” (*shub*) is used mainly to “turn from evil and turn towards good” (Joshua 24:23; Jeremiah 4:4, 14; Hosea 10:12). It is associated with man’s willful decision to “turn back” and reestablish the divine–human relationship! That is exactly what we see in Daniel’s prayer. He acknowledged that God is always ready to keep covenant promises (9:4), “permit man the opportunity once again to be restored” (paraphrased “to turn back”), *“Let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us.... O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies”* (Daniel 9:16, 18).

The theme is the redemption of a personified Jerusalem! Focusing on the physical city detracts completely from the prophecy and renders its beautiful climactic purpose void.

Everlasting righteousness will be granted, will come in. There will be saints who have that clean, white linen of holiness. Jerusalem, the holy city will be restored within specific boundaries of time!

Paired with the word “restore” (*shub*) is the word “build” (*bana*). Though used with actual construction of buildings, walls and roads, there was a metaphorical use introduced by Jeremiah: *“Again I will build you and you shall be built”* (Jeremiah 31:4; cf. Jeremiah 24:6, 33:7). God is always the implied subject. If man does his part, God will do His. A similar promise is recorded later by Amos that the house of David would be rebuilt (Amos 9:11). Another spiritual allusion: *“A Song of degrees for Solomon. Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain”* (Psalm 127:1).

“the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times” (vs 25)

The “street” (*rehob*) denotes an “open place” or often an open square in the middle of a town or village. At the time of Israel’s apostasy these were places where idols were set up (Ezekiel 16:24, 31). With Jerusalem representing God’s people, that would represent His desire to see

their center of worship be reestablished with Him. It suggests that when this corporate body has been clothed with His righteousness, the heart temple, the center of affections, will have been purified. Holiness and righteousness will supervene.

Another “hint is introduced by the use of the word ‘walls’ (*harus*). The word “street” and “walls” are together in the Hebrew. The word for walls is prefixed by a *w^e*, joining the two words as being inseparable. However, the way *harus* follows, it suggests a causative outcome.

“*w^e harus*,” as used here, **literally** means a moat, or something that has been carved out. It is a Hebrew *metaphor* for either an act, decision or event that, when accomplished, cannot be changed! (cf. Joel 3:14).¹¹ It is “sculptured,” “carved out” as irrevocable. That is incredible!

God’s people have corporately brought heaven’s power into the church and their lives, irrevocably. This is alluding to a time that is unveiled in Revelation 7 of the 144,000 when they are sealed. It is an elevated prophecy that God “will” have a holy people. It is what the Hebrew clearly reveals as occurring in Daniel 8:14 that on or after 2300 Atonement years when holiness will be adjudicated (*qodesh nisdaq*). The case will be closed. God’s character will be vindicated and holiness will irrevocably be the nature of the saints!

The phrase “shall be build again” in actuality says, “will have been built.” This commentary suggests that that will occur in the time of trouble.

The concept of a physical Jerusalem must be replaced with the elevated theme of restoration, deliverance and holiness of God’s people. Gabriel is drawing the prophetic precincts what it will be like when all conflict will end. “Move away from the earthly to the heavenly – that is God’s object for His people.”

That “building” project – the spiritual restoration of God’s people will occur in:

“troubled times” (vs 25)

In all of apocalyptic prophecy there are times of “trouble” or “tribulation.” Daniel 12:1 alludes to this. Clearer still is the description of the corporate body – that great multitude – that surrounds the throne.

*“And he said to me, These are they which came out of **great tribulation**, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”* (Revelation 7:14).

It is during this period that the woman flees into the wilderness (Revelation 12:14). It is **this** time in which Jesus (in His Priestly imagery) is pledging His blood (Daniel 12:7), noted unequivocally as a three and a half year period (timed in annual feast language) that will end **the** time of persecution (tribulation/distress).

Once again, the 490-year period will not be complete or its purpose fulfilled until the time of the end, during a tribulation period – there’s a gap. God keeps dropping hints of “when” His dreams of a holy people will consummate! Daniel 12:1 tells us **when** that period of trouble will be!

¹¹ TWOT Hebrew Wordbook on “*w^e harus*.”

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