

APPROXIMATE FULFILLMENT AS THE KEY
TO RECONSIDERING THE DECREE OF CYRUS
AS THE BEGINNING POINT OF DANIEL'S 70 WEEKS

DAVID LARSON*

Abstract: *Apart from chronological factors, the decree of Cyrus has much to commend it as the terminus a quo of Daniel's 70 weeks. However, its inability to provide chronological verification of the first 69 weeks has led many evangelical scholars to prefer a later decree as the starting point. One approach that seems to have been largely overlooked is using literal but approximate fulfillment to defend the decree of Cyrus as the starting point of the 70 weeks. It is proposed that the first 69 weeks were fulfilled literally, but approximately, beginning with the decree of Cyrus. It will be demonstrated that approximate fulfillment is consistent with the nature of chronological prophecy and is even to be preferred over minutely exact fulfillment. It will also be shown that the exact chronological fulfillment proposed by those who use the decree of Artaxerxes's 20th year as the starting point does not prove the correctness of their view.*

Key words: 70 weeks, Daniel 9, prophecy, eschatology, Cyrus, biblical chronology

In Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks, the *terminus a quo* is stated to be "the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem" (Dan 9:2). From the issuing of this decree "until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens' and sixty-two 'sevens.'"¹ Various identifications of this decree have been proposed, including the decree of Cyrus's first year (Ezra 1:1–4), the decree of Artaxerxes's 7th year (Ezra 7), and the decree of Artaxerxes's 20th year (Neh 2).² Liberal scholars of the historical-critical school typically identify the decree (דָּבָר) as the word of the Lord through Jeremiah in Jeremiah 25, referred to by Daniel in Daniel 9:2.³ In this view, the 70 years and the 70 weeks share the same starting point and thus overlap.⁴

* David Larson is Northeast Regional Field Director for International Students, Inc., 19 Besemer Road, Ithaca, NY 14850. He may be contacted at dlarson778@gmail.com.

¹ Quotations of Scripture are from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

² In favor of the decree of Cyrus, see Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Hermeneutical Factors in Determining the Beginning of the Seventy Weeks," *TrinJ* 6.2 NS (1985): 131–49. In favor of the decree of Artaxerxes's 7th year, see Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, NAC 18 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 263–66; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 619. In favor of the decree of Artaxerxes's 20th year, see Robert Anderson, *The Coming Prince: The Last Great Monarch of Christendom* (1881; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1984), 119–29; Harold W. Hoehner, "Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ, Part VI: Daniel's Seventy Weeks and New Testament Chronology," *BSac* 132.525 (1975): 47–65.

³ Daniel 9:25 uses דָּבָר to describe the "decree" (NIV) that begins the 70 weeks. In Jeremiah 25:1, it is the דָּבָר of the Lord that comes to Jeremiah concerning the exile, whereas the word used to describe Cyrus's decree is קוֹל in Ezra 1:1 (NIV "proclamation") or טַעַם in Ezra 5:13 (NIV "decree"). But not too

Because the prophecy has a chronological component, the initial decree must either precede by 69 “sevens” ($69 \times 7 = 483$ years) the coming of the Messiah / Anointed One, or the proposal must provide a convincing rationale for not requiring a literal fulfillment of the predicted interval. Most evangelical scholars favor a literal fulfillment of the time interval and have not given serious consideration to the decree of Cyrus as the beginning point of the 70 weeks because of its failure to provide exact chronological fulfillment. Leon Wood expresses this opinion when he says, “Considering first Cyrus’ decree of 538/37 B.C. as the *terminus a quo*, this occasion can now be discarded, because a period of 483 years simply runs out before Christ’s birth.”⁵

D. Brent Sandy, while not specifically addressing chronological prophecies, points out factors that make the interpretation of OT prophecy challenging and suggests that we need to rethink the language of prophecy.⁶ In that spirit, as a way of rethinking how numbers are used in chronological prophecies, an argument will be presented for literal but approximate fulfillment as a key to reconsidering the decree of Cyrus. First, however, it must be demonstrated why, apart from chronological factors, the decree of Cyrus has much to commend it as the *terminus a quo* of the 70 weeks.

I. THE CASE FOR THE DECREE OF CYRUS

The context for the giving of the 70-weeks prophecy in Daniel 9 favors the decree of Cyrus. In the first part of the chapter, Daniel, recognizing that the 70 years of exile prophesied by Jeremiah were nearing their end (9:2), prayed that God would turn his wrath away from Jerusalem (9:16) and look with favor on the desolate sanctuary (9:17). While he was still praying, an answer was given (9:23). This answer came from the angel Gabriel in the form of the prophecy of the 70 weeks (9:24–27). It appears that the decree that was the answer to the end of the 70 years of exile also initiated a new period marked by 70 times 7.⁷ Poythress, drawing upon

much should be made of the use of a word other than דָּבָר to describe the decree of Cyrus. Esther 1:19 clearly uses דָּבָר to refer to a royal decree.

⁴ James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927), 391–94.

⁵ Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 253.

⁶ D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 195–98.

⁷ Anderson distinguishes between the 70 years of servitude to Babylon (Jer 29:10) and 70 years of desolation of Jerusalem (Jer 25:11–12). He thinks that Daniel 9:2 is referring to the latter, running from the siege of Jerusalem in 589 BC to the laying of the temple’s foundation in 520 BC. In this case, the 70 years in view in 9:2 had not been completed by the time of Cyrus’s decree, thus disqualifying it as the starting point of the 70 weeks. See Anderson, *Coming Prince*, 241–45. Poythress argues against Anderson’s two 70-year periods, noting, among other things, that the 70 weeks in Jeremiah 25 refer to the years of servitude because 25:12 indicates that Babylon will be punished at the end of the 70 years, and that clearly took place in connection with the fall of Babylon. Poythress, “Hermeneutical Factors,” 148. Moreover, it seems likely that Daniel would have in view the 70 years of servitude, since his exile in 605 BC marked the beginning of that period and his prayer in Daniel 9 anticipates the soon end of 70 years.

Kline, concurs: "The logical conclusion from this language is that the beginning point of the 70 weeks basically coincides with the end of Jeremiah's 70 years."⁸

If this is correct, one would expect a prominent decree matching the description in 9:25 to come soon after Daniel's prayer, as indeed is the case. The decree of Cyrus precipitated the end of the exile and allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. It was prominent in its proclamation, recorded in Scripture (Ezra 1:1–4) and resulted in the return from exile. As Poythress says, "All the evidence actually available at the time would point interpreters to the conclusion that Dan 9:25 refers to Cyrus's decree."⁹

Those who advocate for the later decrees of Artaxerxes's 7th or 20th years as the *terminus a quo* for the 70 weeks argue that, even apart from considerations of chronological fulfillment, the decree of Cyrus cannot be the decree that begins the 70 weeks because it relates only to the building of the temple, not to the restoration of the city, as required by Daniel's prophecy.¹⁰ But Isaiah had prophesied that Cyrus would be the one to authorize not only the rebuilding of the temple, but the rebuilding of the city: "He [Cyrus] 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'" (Isa 44:28, see also 45:13). It should be kept in mind, as Poythress notes, that Isaiah's prophecy would have been known to the people of Daniel's time.¹¹ Given Isaiah's prophecy, the prominence of Cyrus's decree, and the close contextual connection between the end of the 70 years' exile and the beginning of the 70 weeks, how would the Jews of that time *not* have assumed that the decree to which Daniel was referring was the decree of Cyrus? Furthermore, in support of the likelihood that Ezra, in recording Cyrus's decree with an exclusive emphasis on rebuilding the temple (Ezra 1:3), may not have provided the full text of the decree; consider this citation given by Josephus: "King Cyrus to Sisīnēs and Sarabasanēs, greeting. To those among the Jews dwelling in my country, who so wished, I have given permission to return to their native land *and to rebuild the city* and build the temple of God in Jerusalem on the same spot on which it formerly stood."¹² Clearly, it was the decree of Cyrus that authorized and set in motion the rebuilding process that the later decrees allowed to progress further.

II. CHRONOLOGY AND THE DECREE OF CYRUS

Those who advocate the decree of Cyrus as the beginning point of the 70 weeks have taken one of two approaches to the chronological issue. Some have taken a symbolic approach, such as Edward J. Young, who says that the sevens are

⁸ Poythress, "Hermeneutical Factors" 134.

⁹ Poythress, "Hermeneutical Factors" 135.

¹⁰ Anderson, *The Coming Prince*, 55; John C. Whitcomb, *Daniel* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 131; Thomas D. Ice, "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel," Pre-Trib Research Center at Scholars Crossing, Liberty University, article 109, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/pretrib_arch/109 (2009), 15.

¹¹ Poythress, "Hermeneutical Factors," 136.

¹² Josephus, *Ant.* 11.1.3 (Marcus, LCL), italics mine.

not sevens of years but are to be regarded as a symbolic number.¹³ Young agrees with Keil, who says that the 70 sevens represent an “indefinite designation of a period of time measured by the number seven, whose chronological duration must be determined on other grounds.”¹⁴ Poythress, in favor of the symbolic approach, argues that “there is no firm grammatical-historical reason for saying that the weeks are weeks of years.”¹⁵ He says that the temporal language of Daniel’s prophecy follows a sabbatical and jubilee pattern and that this pattern as an OT symbolical pattern need not be confined to either years or days. Thus, “the word ‘week, heptad’ might also be used to designate a period of still another length, if that period were *viewed* as related to the sabbatical pattern.”¹⁶ But Poythress fails to build a compelling case. Contrary to the notion that the sabbatical and jubilee pattern could be used symbolically to refer to time periods of any length, Steinmann states: “The Jubilee was not only important historically for marking time—and made it possible for Israel to track its history over long periods of time—but also eventually became a way of imposing order on history and for interpreting prophetic time periods.”¹⁷

In the proposed view, literal but approximate is not the same as symbolic, for in the symbolic view the 70 weeks are understood as indefinite periods of time determined on other grounds. In opposition to the symbolic view, it can be noted that Daniel could determine, based on Jeremiah’s prophecy of the 70 years, that the period of exile was approaching its end. As previously noted, there is a close contextual connection between the prophecy of the 70 years and that of the 70 weeks. Consistency would lead us to expect that, if the 70-years prophecy could be used to determine that the end of the exile was near, the 70-weeks prophecy could be used to determine when the coming of Messiah was near. This is not possible using the symbolic approach of Young or Poythress. Tanner makes a similar point when, critiquing the symbolic view, he says: “Since the latter [the 70 years] was established on a foundation of seventy literal years, logically the extended period [70 weeks] should be viewed as literal as well.”¹⁸

The second chronological approach used by those advocating the decree of Cyrus as the *terminus a quo* of the 70 weeks is the modified chronology approach. John Calvin, who is representative of this view, begins the 70 weeks with the decree of Cyrus. Calvin says, “It is quite clear that the commencement of the seventy weeks cannot be otherwise interpreted than by referring it to the monarchy of Cy-

¹³ Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 206.

¹⁴ C. F. Keil, “Daniel,” trans. M. G. Easton, in C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (1866–1891; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 9:718. Keil is speaking with approval of the position of Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann and Theodor Kliefoth, both 19th-century Lutheran theologians.

¹⁵ Poythress, “Hermeneutical Factors,” 143.

¹⁶ Poythress, “Hermeneutical Factors,” 143, *italics* his.

¹⁷ Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 36.

¹⁸ J. Paul Tanner, “Is Daniel’s Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 2,” *BSac* 166.663 (2009):

rus.”¹⁹ Calvin seeks fulfillment of the 70 weeks in 490 literal years and reconciles the years through modified chronology. He acknowledges that almost all secular writers reckon 550 years from the reign of Cyrus to the advent of Christ but says, “I do not hesitate to suppose some errors here.”²⁰ Calvin argues that the standard chronology does not properly account for the overlapping reigns of the Persian kings and that the Persian period was considerably shorter than usually stated. Others who have proposed the modified chronology approach include Martin Anstey and David Cooper.²¹

In response to the modified chronology approach, it can be asserted that the accuracy of traditional chronology, which is based on Ptolemy’s canon, has been convincingly demonstrated.²² Bickerman explains that Ptolemy’s canon was a list of kings preserved in Theon’s commentary on Ptolemy’s astronomical work. It begins with the ascension of Nabonassar in 747 BC and gives astronomically exact dates for the successive reigns of Babylonian and Persian kings.²³ Robert Newton’s *The Crime of Claudius Ptolemy* is an example of challenges to the accuracy of Ptolemy’s canon that have been advanced periodically. But scholarly responses have refuted his debunking effort and have upheld the integrity of Ptolemy’s canon.²⁴ Regarding Cyrus, Julia Neuffer writes, “Cyrus, the Persian conqueror of Babylonia, is locked in place between Nabonidus and Cambyzes, whose reign, like Nebuchadnezzar’s, is fixed by similar multiple data on an astronomical tablet of his seventh year, which includes a record of an eclipse dated to the same seventh year by Ptolemy.”²⁵ Jewish and Christian scholars of OT history consistently uphold the traditional dates of the Persian period and do not support modified chronology.²⁶ Thus, the traditional dates used to calculate the chronology of the 70 weeks should be considered reliable and the modified chronology approach cannot be upheld.

III. APPROXIMATE FULFILLMENT STARTING WITH CYRUS’S DECREE

Based on the inadequacy of the symbolic and modified chronology approaches, many commentators have rejected the decree of Cyrus as a possible starting point for the 70 weeks. But has the decree of Cyrus been dismissed prematurely?

¹⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, vol. 2, trans. Thomas Myers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 213.

²⁰ Calvin, *Daniel*, 199.

²¹ Martin Anstey, *The Romance of Bible Chronology* (New York: Marshall Brothers, 1913), 232–63; David Cooper, *The 70 Weeks of Daniel* (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1941), 38–43.

²² David Noel Freedman, “The Chronology of Israel and the Ancient Near East,” in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. G. Ernest Wright (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 203–13.

²³ E. J. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 81.

²⁴ Julia Neuffer, “‘Ptolemy’s Canon’ Debunked?,” *AUSS* 17.2 (1979): 39–46. See also Carl Olof Jonsson, *The Gentile Times Reconsidered: Chronology and Christ’s Return*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: Commentary Press, 1986), 44–48. Jonsson has updated his discussion at <http://kristenfrihet.se/english/newtpol.htm> (2000).

²⁵ Neuffer, “Ptolemy’s Canon Debunked?,” 44.

²⁶ Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, 176; Ben Zion Wacholder, *Essays on Jewish Chronology and Chronography* (New York: Ktav, 1976), 6; Iain Provan, Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 404.

Another chronological approach to the 70 weeks using the decree of Cyrus is possible and is hereby proposed, namely that the first 69 weeks have been literally but approximately fulfilled. This proposal is unique in that it borrows from what is typically an interpretation of Reformed scholars (the decree of Cyrus as the *terminus a quo* of the 70 weeks)²⁷ and modifies it by proposing literal but approximate fulfillment, such that the result is not incompatible with Reformed theology and could be more amenable to those who hold a premillennial, even dispensational, theology.

1. *Previous attempts at approximate fulfillment.* Literal but approximate fulfillment of the 70 weeks has been proposed before, but not in connection with a messianic prophetic interpretation. The historical-critical view, as presented by James A. Montgomery, provides a literal but approximate reckoning of the years, beginning with the word from Jeremiah related to the 70 years in exile in Jeremiah 25 and ending with the rededication of the temple in 164 BC in the time of the Maccabees.²⁸ This word from Jeremiah came in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 25:1), which was 605 BC, but Montgomery instead uses the date of the destruction of Jerusalem as the date he associates with the beginning of the desolation of Jerusalem.²⁹ His interval is about 69 years too short, but Montgomery attributes this to a chronological miscalculation on the part of the writer, who he assumes was primarily writing history, not prophecy.³⁰ This view must be rejected for several reasons—its dismissal of predictive prophecy, its questionable identification of the starting point of the 70 weeks as the word from Jeremiah,³¹ and its cavalier attitude toward historical error in the Bible.³² However, the concept of approximate fulfillment inherent in this view can be redeemed and defended as consistent with a messianic interpretation and a high view of Scripture.

2. *The nature of chronological prophecies.* There appear to be seventeen events prophesied in Scripture that have a specific time element in their fulfillment involving a period of at least several years.³³ In Genesis 6:3, God foretold that there would be 120 years until man was destroyed. In Genesis 15:13, God tells Abram that his seed will experience a 400-year sojourn in a foreign land. In Genesis 41:26–30, Joseph prophesies 7 years of famine and 7 years of plenty. Numbers 14:33–34

²⁷ Young, Poythress, and Calvin represent Reformed, amillennial theology. Keil was Lutheran, but also amillennial.

²⁸ Montgomery, *Daniel*, 391–94.

²⁹ Montgomery, *Daniel*, 392.

³⁰ Montgomery, *Daniel*, 393. Montgomery believes the last seven chapters of Daniel were written in the Maccabean era but prior to the reconsecration of the temple (97). Thus, at the time of writing all but the last half of the 70th week of Daniel was already history, and the fulfillment of the last part, culminating in the reconsecration of the temple, was yet future (98).

³¹ While Jeremiah's word about the 70-year exile may *imply* that a return and restoration will take place after the designated years have expired, it does not specifically address or authorize the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem, as the decree of Cyrus does (notwithstanding arguments that its scope is limited to the temple).

³² For further analysis of the critical view, see Miller, *Daniel*, 253–54.

³³ There are other prophecies involving just a few days, such as those involving the Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker, which were fulfilled in three days (Gen 40:12–22) and Jesus's prophecy that he would rise on the third day (Matt 16:21–22).

records the prophecy of the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Isaiah prophesied that Ephraim would be broken in 65 years (7:8), Tyre would be forgotten for 70 years (23:15), and 15 years would be added to Hezekiah's life (38:5). Jeremiah prophesied the 70 years of exile (25:11–12; 29:10). Ezekiel prophesied that Egypt would not be inhabited for 40 years (29:11–12) and that, following the defeat of Gog, the weapons will be burned with fire for 7 years (39:9). Daniel prophesied a three-and-one-half year interval at the end of the age (7:25; 12:7), a 2,300-day (or 1,150-day) desolation of the temple (8:14), a period of 70 sevens (9:24–27) and periods of 1,290 and 1,335 days to be fulfilled at the end of the age (12:11, 12). The book of Revelation predicts a period of 1,260 days or 42 months (11:3; 12:6; 13:5) and a 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth (20:4–6).

Of these seventeen events prophesied in Scripture, six (in the premillennial view) still require future fulfillment (Ezek 39:9; Dan 7:25, 12:7; 12:11(2); Rev. 11:3, 12:6, 13:5; 20:4–6), and therefore the exact or approximate nature of their fulfillment cannot be demonstrated.³⁴ Setting aside the prophecy of the 70 weeks, which is the event under investigation, ten events remain for consideration in determining the approximate or exact nature of fulfillment involved in specific chronological prophecies.

The first event involving a time element in its fulfillment is the limitation of man's days to 120 years in Genesis 6:3. Many scholars take this to be a limitation of human lifespan to 120 years after the flood. The genealogies of Genesis 11 demonstrate that the human lifespan after the flood continued to be more than 120 years. Critical scholars recognize this contradiction but argue that it is because Genesis 6 comes from a Yahwist text whereas Genesis 11 comes from a later sacerdotal text.³⁵ However, the supposed contradiction disappears if one takes the 120 years not as the lifespan of humans after the flood but as the number of years that God will allow people to live before the flood comes and destroys mankind. Goldingay supports this interpretation, saying: "The rest of Genesis does not suggest that 120 years is a cap to be placed on a human lifetime," and adds, "More likely it is a cap to be placed on how long Yahweh intends to allow human life on earth to continue."³⁶ This was also the interpretation of Luther, Calvin, and the Scofield Bible.³⁷ Prior to the mention of the 120 years, we are told that Noah was 500 years old when his sons were born (Gen 5:32). Later it is stated that he was 600 years old when the flood came (Gen 7:6). While it is possible that the prophecy of Genesis 6:3 was given 20 years before Noah's sons were born, in which case the interval would be exactly 120 years, there is no data in the text to support this. The information provided in the text suggests an interval of 100 years between the pro-

³⁴ In the amillennial view, some of the Daniel and Revelation references taken as future by premillennialists are assigned to our past, but for the purposes of this survey it is thought best to focus on prophecies that all agree have had past fulfillment.

³⁵ John Skinner, *Genesis*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910), 143–44, esp. 144n3.

³⁶ John Goldingay, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 123.

³⁷ John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2: *Genesis–Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 77.

nouncement of the 120 years and the flood, in which case 120 years was an approximate figure. The data here is only suggestive, as it is not clear whether the reference to Noah's age in the genealogy of chapter 5 is intended to be correlated to God's statement about the 120 years in chapter 6. If the actual number of years elapsed was 100, then it could be asked why the prophecy was not for 100 years, which is a rounded number already, rather than 120. As will be seen in this survey, many prophecies involving time intervals make use of the numbers 7, 40, or intervals thereof. In this case, 120 years is 40 times 3. One hundred years is two and one-half intervals of 40, which rounds up to 3 intervals of 40.

The next chronological prophecy we encounter in Scripture is that of the 400-year sojourn foretold to Abram in Genesis 15:13. The Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years." Exodus 12:40 identifies the actual length of the sojourn in Egypt as 430 years.³⁸ Therefore, it appears that the prediction was fulfilled approximately rather than exactly with a difference of 30 years between the approximate number and the exact number. Note again that this prophecy involves an interval of 40 (40 x 10) and that 10 is also a round number. The prophecy involved a sojourn that would be approximately 10 intervals of 40 years. The exact number was closer to 11, but the prophecy is given using rounded numbers.

Some have attempted to interpret the 400 years in Genesis 15:13 exactly. Hoehner proposes that the bondage in Egypt was 400 years, while the 430 years include an additional 30 years outside Egypt beginning with the confirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant to Jacob in Genesis 35 (see Gal 3:17).³⁹ However, the 430 years mentioned in Exodus 12:40 are specifically linked with the sojourn in Egypt. Paul speaks in Galatians 3:17 of 430 years from the confirmation of the covenant with Abraham and his seed until the giving of the law. Hoehner identifies this confirmation of the covenant with Jacob in Genesis 35, but the best way to reconcile the 430 years of Exodus 12:40 with the 430 years of Galatians 3:17 seems to be starting the 430 years with the final confirmation of the covenant with Jacob in Genesis 46:1–4, upon Jacob's setting out from Canaan with his family for Egypt, thus coinciding with the beginning of the sojourn in Egypt.⁴⁰ Therefore, it is best to conclude that the sojourn in Egypt was 430 years and that the 400 years in Genesis 15:13 are approximate. Steinmann concurs when he says, with the 400 years of Genesis 15:13 specifically in view, that "Israel's time in Egypt is reckoned to be about 400 years in round numbers."⁴¹ Wenham agrees, saying the four generations

³⁸ One complicating factor in unraveling the 430 years of Exodus 12:40 is that the LXX adds "in the land of Canaan," thus making the 430 years include 215 years in Canaan and 215 years in Egypt. Steinman addresses this issue and outlines several problems with a 215-year Egyptian sojourn. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, 68–70.

³⁹ Harold Hoehner, "The Duration of the Egyptian Bondage," *BSac* 126.504 (1969): 313–16.

⁴⁰ Donald G. Campbell, "Galatians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 2 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 2:599.

⁴¹ Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, 68–69. Steinmann begins Paul's 430 years in Galatians 3:17 with Jacob's entrance into Egypt. He sees this as the confirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant in the

are equated to 400 years, suggesting that “they are intended to be round numbers.”⁴² Goldingay likewise states with respect to Genesis 15:13, “Their 400-year stay there is approximately equivalent to the 430 years of Exod 12:40–41.”⁴³

The next chronological prophecy in order is that of the 7 years of plenty and 7 years of famine (Gen 41:26–30). This one appears to be exact. Two years into the famine, Joseph said to his brothers, “For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping” (45:6). Joseph was carefully keeping track of the years and planning accordingly (see also 41:47–54). Note, however, that while the prophecy is exact to the year, no information is provided that would suggest it was exact to the day.

Next in order is the prophecy in Numbers 14:33–34 about the 40 years wandering in the wilderness, given after the failure to enter the land. Moses said, “For forty years—one for each of the forty days you explored the land—you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you” (Num 14:34). When Moses addressed the people before his death, he said, “Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years” (Deut 8:2). However, the exact number of years from the failure to enter the land until Moses addressed the people was 38 years, according to what Moses said in Deuteronomy 2:14: “Thirty-eight years passed from the time we left Kadesh Barnea until we crossed the Zered Valley. By then, that entire generation of fighting men had perished from the camp.” Since the Israelites spent between one and two years in the wilderness (Num 10:11–12) prior to the prophecy of the 40 years of wandering, the prophecy of 40 years could be exact but retroactive if it includes this time prior to the spying of the land. Otherwise, it appears that the fulfillment of the 40 years is approximate.

Next in order of chronological prophecies are Isaiah’s prophecies, first that within 65 years Ephraim would be too shattered to be a people (Isa 7:8). The prophecy was given in 734 BC and the northern kingdom (Ephraim/Samaria) fell to the Assyrians in 723 BC.⁴⁴ Oswalt says that while the referent of the 65 years is uncertain, the prophecy is likely indicating that within a person’s lifespan, “the deportations of the Israelites ... and the importing of groups from other areas in the empire will have completely diluted the genetic heritage of those remaining in the home area of the northern kingdom.”⁴⁵ Martin follows the same general interpretation, but seeks to demonstrate exact fulfillment by assigning the resettling of people of various nations into Samaria to the first year of Ashurbanipal (Ezra 4:10), who reigned over the Assyrian empire from 669–626 BC. The interval then would be from 734 to 669 BC, which is 65 years.⁴⁶ However, while Martin demonstrates the

sense that cutting of the covenant in Genesis 15 included the 400-year prediction about sojourning in a foreign land, and thus the fact that the sojourn was now beginning confirmed the credibility of the prediction and thus of the accompanying covenant.

⁴² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 332.

⁴³ Goldingay, *Genesis*, 251.

⁴⁴ Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, 132.

⁴⁵ John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 138.

⁴⁶ John A. Martin, “Isaiah,” in Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:1047.

plausibility of an exact fulfillment, the data available does not allow for a conclusive statement that the prophecy was fulfilled in exactly 65 years.

Isaiah's next chronological prophecy is that Tyre would be forgotten for 70 years (Isa 23:15). The majority opinion of critical scholars is that this was fulfilled from 332 BC, when Alexander the Great destroyed Tyre, until 274 BC, when it revived under Ptolemy II (a period of 58 years as a rough approximation of 70).⁴⁷ Oswalt says that it is unclear what the 70-year period refers to, but notes that Motyer sees it as coming between Sennacherib and the rise of Nebuchadnezzar.⁴⁸ Martin observes that in 701 BC Assyria installed Ethbaal III over Tyre, thus beginning an era of Assyrian dominance over Tyre that continued until Assyria declined in power around 630 BC, enabling Tyre to restore its trade.⁴⁹ Given the lack of consensus as to when the 70 years took place and, even in Martin's proposal, the inherent imprecision in marking the end of the interval, various viable proposals can reasonably be asserted in which the prophecy has at least approximate fulfillment, but we have insufficient data to demonstrate exact fulfillment.

Isaiah's third chronological prophecy is that of 15 years of extended life for Hezekiah (Isa 38:4). Hezekiah was sick to the point of death, but he prayed earnestly, and God answered through Isaiah that 15 years would be added to his life (2 Kgs 20:1–6). Hezekiah died in 686 BC. If the 15 years were exact, his illness and recovery would have been in 701 BC, the same year in which Jerusalem was miraculously delivered from Sennacherib and the Assyrians in answer to his prayer. Steinmann takes this view, saying that Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem in the summer of 701 BC and Hezekiah became sick in the same year, followed shortly after by the envoy from Babylon.⁵⁰ If this is the correct interpretation, then the prophecy of 15 years was fulfilled exactly to the year. While there are some complexities which could suggest an approximate fulfillment, for the purposes of this survey, this fulfillment will be considered as very plausibly exact.

The next chronologically defined prophecy is Ezekiel's prophecy of 40 years of non-habitation for Egypt (Ezek 29:11–12). Fredenburg, who identifies the year of the prophecy as 587 BC, offers no specific demonstration of fulfillment but says that 40 years is symbolic of a generation.⁵¹ Dyer sees the predicted period of non-habitation as following Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of Egypt, which, according to Unger, occurred in 568 BC.⁵² He notes that Cyrus came to power 33 years later and presumably allowed deported Egyptians to return to Egypt, in keeping with his policy. Dyer comments, "Allowing seven additional years for the people to return and rebuild, a 40-year period of desolation was entirely possible."⁵³ Once again,

⁴⁷ Jack Partain and Richard Deutsch, *A Guide to Isaiah 1–39*, EpC (London: SPCK, 1986), 135.

⁴⁸ Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 274.

⁴⁹ Martin, "Isaiah," 1071.

⁵⁰ Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, 156–57.

⁵¹ Brandon L. Fredenburg, *Ezekiel*, CPNIVC (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002), 260.

⁵² Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 782.

⁵³ Charles H. Dyer, "Ezekiel," in Walvoord and Zuck, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:1286. Based on the 568 BC date for the defeat of Egypt, it would appear the interval was about 30 years (568 BC to

while exact fulfillment is plausible, the best that can be demonstrated is approximate fulfillment.

Next in order is Jeremiah's prophecy of the 70 years in exile, which is of special interest because of its contextual connection to the prophecy of the 70 weeks. The most recognized interval for the fulfillment of the 70 years is from the first deportation (Jer 29:1–3; Dan 1:1–4) to the return from exile (2 Chr 36:22–23; Ezra 1–2). The dates for the first deportation (605 BC), the fall of Babylon (539 BC), and the decree of Cyrus (538 BC) are well established,⁵⁴ but there are different interpretations regarding the exact date for the end of the exile. Some regard Cyrus's decree as the end of the exile.⁵⁵ Others identify the actual return as the end of the exile, but some place it in the same year as Cyrus's decree,⁵⁶ whereas others place it later, such as 536 BC.⁵⁷ Steinmann, drawing upon external evidence related to the post-exilic cycle of sabbatical years, argues for a return date of 533 BC.⁵⁸ Therefore, while some propose an interval of exactly 70 years,⁵⁹ it seems likely that it was a few years less or more. Gentry and Wellum give the interval as 66 to 68 years.⁶⁰ Steinmann's interval is 72 years (605 BC to 533 BC). Given the likelihood that the interval was not exactly 70 years, David Kennedy argues for a symbolic use of 70 in the 70-year captivity and concludes that the 70 weeks are symbolic also.⁶¹ However, all that the data actually suggest is that the 70 years are approximate rather than exact. Gentry and Wellum concur, saying: "The logic of a 'symbolic view' is difficult to follow. Admittedly, sixty-six or sixty-eight years is not exactly seventy.... But the exile was roughly 70 years."⁶² Miller likewise says, "Considering that the 70 years is a round number, the sixty-eight years or so of the exile is an amazing fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy."⁶³ Daniel understood the 70 years in a literal sense, for when they were almost completed, he expected and prayed for the end of the exile (Daniel 9). The seventy years were literal but most likely approximate.

The final chronological prophecy to consider is that of the 2,300 evenings and mornings in Daniel 8:14, which was the period the temple was to endure desolation before it was reconsecrated. Keil argues extensively for fulfillment in 2,300 days, and many scholars follow him, including Young.⁶⁴ Whitcomb also takes the proph-

about 538 BC, when Cyrus let the Jewish exiles return. Presumably other exiles might have been allowed to return about the same time).

⁵⁴ Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, 169, 175, 180.

⁵⁵ Poythress, "Hermeneutical Factors" 135.

⁵⁶ Martin gives 538 BC for the return. Martin, "Isaiah," 652.

⁵⁷ Dyer, "Ezekiel," 1161.

⁵⁸ Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, 188–90.

⁵⁹ Layton Talbert, "So Was It 70 Years or Not?," *Theology in 3D*, 4 February 2018, <https://seminary.bju.edu/theology-in-3d/so-was-it-70-years-or-not/>.

⁶⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 634.

⁶¹ David B. Kennedy, "Hermeneutical Issues in Daniel's Seventy Weeks: Context as a Guide for Exegesis and Preaching" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the ETS, Dallas, 15–17 December 1983), 10.

⁶² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 634.

⁶³ Miller, *Daniel*, 241.

⁶⁴ Miller, *Daniel*, 229; Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel*, 175.

ecy as referring to 2,300 days, ending with the rededication of the temple on the 25th day of the 9th month (Chislev), 164 BC. Expecting an exact fulfillment, he counts back 2,300 days to the autumn of 170 BC. He can identify no exact starting point but suggests that the “trampling of the host” (8:13) could “very easily have happened in the fall of 170 B.C.”⁶⁵ Miller supports the 2,300-day view as well, suggesting that the trampling of the host was the murder of Onias III in 170 BC.⁶⁶ But no precise date is given to allow verification of exactly 2,300 days. Archer interprets the prophecy as referring to 1,150 days and sees the fulfillment from the erection of the idolatrous altar in Chislev, 167 BC to the rededication of the temple on December 14, 164 BC. He notes that the interval falls one month and 15 days short of 1,150 days and proposes that the daily sacrifice may have been abolished even before the altar was erected.⁶⁷ Pentecost adjusts on the other end by extending the ending point an additional 45 days into 163 BC, when the Jewish sacrifices were fully restored and religious independence had been gained for Judah.⁶⁸ But Daniel’s prophecy identifies the end point with the reconsecration of the temple, a clearly marked historical event. Once again, while efforts have been made to show the viability of an exact fulfillment, the best that can be demonstrated is approximate fulfillment. Miller remarks that in the 1,150-day view, one must either take the date as a close approximation or make an adjustment (citing Archer).⁶⁹ In my view, the best alternative, whether one supports the 2,300-day or 1,150-day option, is approximate fulfillment.

What can we conclude from our survey of chronological prophecies? For only two do we have data to demonstrate exact fulfillment—the seven years of plenty followed by the seven years of famine and the 15-year extension of Hezekiah’s life. In three cases—65 years for Ephraim to be broken, 70 years for Tyre to be forgotten, and 40 years of Egypt’s non-habitation, the data is insufficient to make any determination about whether the prophecies were exact or approximate. In the case of the 120 years until the flood, while the data is inconclusive, the details of the text are at least suggestive in favor of approximate fulfillment. In the remaining four cases, while efforts have been made to argue for exact fulfillment or at least to show the viability of exact fulfillment, it seems more likely that they were fulfilled approximately. The case for exact fulfillment repeatedly depends on being given the benefit of the doubt. In the case of the 400-year sojourn prophesied in Genesis 15:13, the 430 years mentioned in Exodus 12:40 must be taken to include 30 years in Palestine prior to coming into Egypt, even though Exodus 12:40 explicitly identifies the 430 years with Egypt. Regarding the prophecy of the 40 years wandering in the wilderness, it must be made retroactive to the departure from Egypt. To make the 70-year exile in Babylon exact one must select convenient dates rather

⁶⁵ John C. Whitcomb, *Daniel* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 114.

⁶⁶ Miller, *Daniel*, 230.

⁶⁷ Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Daniel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 7: *Daniel and the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 103.

⁶⁸ Archer, “Daniel,” 103.

⁶⁹ Miller, *Daniel*, 229.

than consensus dates. Most regard it to have been approximately fulfilled. And the 2,300 evenings and mornings are made exact by some only by questionably adjusting the starting point or ending point. The most natural interpretation of the chronological fulfillment of these prophecies is that which is least forced, based on a normal reading of the text and unbiased evaluation of the chronological data, and such an approach leads to the conclusion that, generally, chronological prophecy is literally but approximately fulfilled. This conclusion is not contrary to belief in inerrancy but simply acknowledges that the authors (human and divine) intended these chronological prophecies to be fulfilled approximately and not exactly, especially when involving rounded numbers or multiples of symbolically significant numbers such as 7 or 40. If this conclusion is correct, then approximate fulfillment can be applied to the 70 weeks of Daniel, which provides just cause for reconsidering the decree of Cyrus as the starting point of the 70 weeks.

3. *Degree of latitude in fulfillment defended.* It might be objected that the degree of latitude required in the fulfillment of the first 69 weeks using the decree of Cyrus as the starting point is too great. The interval from the decree of Cyrus (538 BC) “until the Anointed One” (26 to 33 AD)⁷⁰ is 563 to 570 years, at least 80 years longer than required by exact fulfillment. It is true that none of the other approximate fulfillments involve such a large difference. There was, however, a 30-year latitude in the fulfillment of the 400-year sojourn in Egypt. Three points can be made to address the degree of latitude in the fulfillment as proposed, with the decree of Cyrus as the starting point.

First, “until the Anointed One” could very well refer to the birth of Christ, which would shorten the overrun to about 50 years, which is more compatible with the 30-year precedent just mentioned. Jesus was announced as Messiah at his birth (Luke 2:11). It is commonly thought that the magi from the east came from Persia.⁷¹ If this is true, it is not unlikely that they had knowledge of Daniel’s prophecy of the 70 weeks, for Daniel himself had been prominent among the wise men in Persia (Dan 2:18), and his prophecy may well have been preserved and carefully considered by the magi of succeeding generations. We are told that they came in search of Christ because of the star in the east (Matt 2:2), but their anticipation of such a sign may have been informed by their calculation of Daniel’s 69 weeks. If so, they understood “until the Anointed One” to refer to his birth. Miller acknowledges that the coming of Messiah at the end of the 69 weeks “could refer to Christ’s birth, his baptism, or his presentation to Israel ... on Palm Sunday.”⁷² The proposal that the 70 weeks began with Cyrus’s decree and were literally but approximately fulfilled does not depend on using the birth of Christ as the endpoint of the 69

⁷⁰ Archer uses the baptism of Jesus in autumn of AD 26 as the ending point of the 69 weeks (based on a date of AD 30 for the crucifixion). Hoehner uses Palm Sunday in AD 33 (based on an AD 33 crucifixion).

⁷¹ For example, see Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 99.

⁷² Miller, *Daniel*, 265.

weeks, but such an identification is worthy of consideration and would strengthen the case for approximate fulfillment starting with Cyrus's decree.⁷³

Second, even with a differential on the order of 80 years, the prophecy provided the chronological framework to allow the Jews of Jesus's time to have a high degree of expectation in the arrival of the Messiah. David Hamstra concludes from several independent lines of evidence as well as from the explicit link between the seventy weeks and the anticipated arrival of a Messiah in Melchizedek (11Q13) that the seventy-weeks prophecy was intelligible, in principle, to those among whom it was fulfilled and resulted in first-century Messianic expectation.⁷⁴ Moreover, according to the research of Roger Beckwith, in the centuries leading up to Christ both the Essene and Hellenistic chronological scheme of Demetrius dated the exile from about 560 to 490 BC. The Essenes began Daniel's 70 weeks with the return from exile and expected it to expire between 3 BC and AD 2.⁷⁵ The Pharisaic view of Seder Olam Rabbah, written with the benefit of hindsight, dated the exile from 421 to 351 BC, but used the beginning of the exile as the *terminus a quo* of the 70 weeks, thus identifying the 70th week as the period AD 63 to 70, culminating in the destruction of the temple.⁷⁶ Beckwith concludes: "If the 70 year-weeks are interpreted in conformity with the 70 years of Jeremiah and the first 7 year-weeks, as *approximate* (and more approximate because of the much greater length of time involved), the period given agrees well enough with a fulfillment between 10 BC and 70 AD."⁷⁷ Therefore, a latitude of 80 years in fulfilling the 69 weeks is not too great to consider the fulfillment approximate.

IV. EXPLANATION OF EXACT FULFILLMENT

Robert Anderson and Harold Hoehner, making use of a 360-day prophetic year, have proposed exact fulfillment of the first 69 weeks of Daniel's prophecy to the day, beginning with the decree of Artaxerxes's 20th year (445/444 BC) and ending with Palm Sunday (AD 32/33).⁷⁸ If the decree of Cyrus is the starting point of the 70 weeks of Daniel, then the chronological verification proposed by Anderson and Hoehner must be explained. Does not such an amazing chronological verification, down to the very day, prove the correctness of the Artaxerxes view?

⁷³ Using the birth of Christ as the *terminus a quem* for the 69 weeks does not preclude a futuristic 70th week and a gap between the 69th and 70th week. The cutting off of Messiah (crucifixion) after the 69th week is still true, whether it comes 5 days, 3½ years or 30 years after the end of the 69th week. However, if one expects a 70th week fulfillment immediately after the 69th week, then there is nothing in the first 7 years after Christ's birth that would seem to fit.

⁷⁴ David J. Hamstra, "The Seventy-Weeks Prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27 and First-Century AD Jewish Messianic Expectation," *AUSJ* 4.1 (2020): 28.

⁷⁵ Roger T. Beckwith, "Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah's Coming in Essene, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Zealot and Early Christian Computation," *RevQ* 10.4 (1981): 523.

⁷⁶ Beckwith, "Daniel 9," 532.

⁷⁷ Beckwith, "Daniel 9," 542, italics his.

⁷⁸ Robert Anderson, *The Coming Prince*, 123–28. Hoehner, "Daniel's Seventy Weeks and New Testament Chronology," 47–65.

Though proposed fulfillment to the very day is impressive, if its claims can be verified, we must ask whether we have precedent that leads us to expect exact fulfillment to the day. Our study of the nature of chronological prophecies suggests that we do not—rather, we should expect such prophecies to be literally but approximately fulfilled. When the fulfillment is exact to the year, we have no precedent for exactness to the day. Therefore, those seeking to show fulfillment that is too exact, however well-intended, may be trying to prove more than is warranted by the nature of fulfilled prophecy.

Robert Anderson, the first to attempt to demonstrate exact fulfillment to the day in the prophecy of Daniel's 70 weeks, purports to provide a precedent of exact fulfillment to the day in the prophecy of the 70 years of desolations for Jerusalem. Anderson distinguishes between the 70 years of servitude to Babylon and the 70 years of desolations for Jerusalem. He marks the beginning of the latter with the beginning of the siege against Jerusalem on the 10th day of Tebeth, 589 BC, and marks the end of the 70 years with the laying of the foundation of the temple on the 24th of Chislev, 520 BC. He calculates the interval as 25,202 days, which is only two more than exactly 70 prophetic years (360-day years). This discrepancy he addresses by suggesting that the interval begins one day after the siege and ends one day before the laying of the foundation of the temple.⁷⁹ There are several issues with Anderson's solution. First, the notion of two distinct intervals for the 70 years has been challenged, as seen earlier in Poythress.⁸⁰ Second, the calculation depends on a 360-day prophetic year, which, as will be discussed later, many see to be questionable. Third, the beginning and ending points seem to be chosen somewhat arbitrarily to make the calculation come out right, rather than being based on clear or consistent criteria. Why start the interval with the beginning of the siege and not with the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC? Why end the interval with the dedication of the temple in 520 BC and not with the return to the land? And why start the interval a day after the siege and a day before the dedication, except to make the interval come out precisely? Poythress comments, "The more one works with this, the more one sees that Anderson actually had quite a few options for picking dates to form the basis for a mathematically exact calculation. He chose the options that gave him the result he was looking for."⁸¹ If chronological prophecies were truly intended to be fulfilled to the exact day, there should be more examples than this one, which is susceptible to the charge of being conveniently contrived.

Regarding the seeming improbability of such exact fulfillment, it should be recognized that the exact chronological verification of the view that begins with Artaxerxes's 20th year is possible due to the proximity and dependence of the proposed starting and ending points to the true starting and ending points. Since God foretold a period of 490 years and the fulfillment of the prophecy is guaranteed

⁷⁹ Anderson, *Coming Prince*, 70–71, 242–45.

⁸⁰ See note 7 above.

⁸¹ Poythress, "Hermeneutical Factors," 148.

(given faith in the reliability of God's Word and a literal approach to the years), and since the proposed starting and ending points bear some relation historically to the true starting and ending points, the resulting interval would inevitably come out at least close to the desired result. A significant coincidental factor remains to be explained, but due to the guaranteed accuracy of the prophecy, exact chance fulfillment is feasible rather than preposterous. Moreover, the coincidental factor remaining is not as great as might be supposed, for there are numerous possible intervals to work with to find one that equals 483 years to the day. There are at least four options for the beginning decree, as outlined earlier. The decree of Artaxerxes's 20th year is chosen because it fits the chronological scheme, but if it did not there are other options to work with. If using the decree of Artaxerxes's 20th year, there are 30 possible days of the month Nisan which could be used for the starting point, since Nehemiah 2 does not specify the day of the month the decree was given. Two possible years have been used for the 20th year of Artaxerxes—445 BC by Anderson and 444 BC by Hoehner. Two different types of year can be used—a 360-day prophetic year or a 365-day normal year. At least five possible ending points of the 69th week could be used. The primary proposals use either the baptism of Christ or Palm Sunday (we could add the birth of Christ with all the possible date options that have been proposed for it). Defensible dates for the baptism of Christ and Palm Sunday include AD 26, 27, 28, 30, 31 and 33 (not to mention the range of possible days in these years if Christ's baptism is used as the end point). It is not that surprising, then, given that the prophetic accuracy of God's Word guarantees that all the possibilities will at least be in the general proximity of the desired result, so that one who works hard enough at examining possible intervals could find an interval that exactly equals 483 years. The assessment of Poythress again applies: "The more one works with this, the more one sees that Anderson actually had quite a few options for picking dates to form the basis for a mathematically exact calculation. He chose the options that gave him the result he was looking for."⁸²

Not only is the improbability of exact-to-the-day fulfillment not as insurmountable as it might seem, but if either of the following objections holds, then the exact fulfillment interpretation is invalidated. The first factor that potentially invalidates the exact-to-the-day scheme is use of a 360-day prophetic year. Poythress argues extensively that use of a 360-day year is untenable. Regarding the calculation of the reigns of Israelite kings, the years given in genealogies, or the calculations for Jubilee years, Poythress asks, "Does *anyone* seriously want to contend that figures of this type were intended to be understood in terms of 360-day years instead of solar years?"⁸³ While the Israelites thought of any single year as 360 days (more precisely, twelve lunar months are 354 days), they periodically inserted an intercalary month to keep the calendar from drifting. When a short period of time is in view, such as the 1,260 days of Revelation 12:6 or the period of the flood in Genesis 7–9, no

⁸² Poythress, "Hermeneutical Factors," 147.

⁸³ Poythress, "Hermeneutical Factors," 145.

intercalary insertions are needed, but when a longer sequence of years is in view, as in Daniel 9, intercalary months are to be expected as a natural part of the reckoning.⁸⁴ Gentry and Wellum concur with Poythress in objecting to use of a 360-day year. Regarding use of the prophetic year, they comment: “Harold Hoehner ... uses so-called ‘prophetic years’ of 360 days but with scant support for such a calendrical definition or evidence that this is typical in prophetic predictions.”⁸⁵

The second objection that could disprove the exact-to-the-day theory relates to the year chosen for the crucifixion. Hoehner adjusted Anderson’s scheme because Anderson used AD 32 for the crucifixion, a date which does not have strong support. Instead, Hoehner used AD 33 and moved up the starting point from 445 BC to 444 BC to compensate. While Steinmann builds a strong case for AD 33 as the year of the crucifixion, he also acknowledges that the most popular choice has been AD 30.⁸⁶ Bond, while also acknowledging a scholarly preference for AD 30, argues that we can only be certain that Jesus died between AD 29 and 34.⁸⁷ Hoehner and Steinman could be correct about AD 33, but it should be noted that when one is positing exact fulfillment, any one date shown to be in error invalidates the proof. To the extent that there is reasonable scholarly dispute over the date of the crucifixion, the claims for exact fulfillment of the 69 weeks should be made with appropriate tentativeness.

V. CONCLUSION

The decree of Cyrus has typically been rejected as the starting point of the 70 weeks of Daniel because of its failure to provide chronological fulfillment for the first 69 weeks. However, literal but approximate fulfillment can be demonstrated based on the decree of Cyrus, and it can be shown that approximate fulfillment is more consistent with the nature of chronological prophecy than exact fulfillment, especially minutely exact fulfillment. Since, as has been argued, all the evidence available at the time would point interpreters to the conclusion that Daniel 9:25 refers to Cyrus’s decree; since chronological fulfillment can be adequately demonstrated within appropriate parameters; and since the exact chronological verification of the main alternative, the Artaxerxes view of Anderson and Hoehner, is based on some questionable premises (most notably a 360-day year) and is not as coincidentally impossible as might be supposed, it should be concluded that the 70 weeks of Daniel began with the decree of Cyrus.

⁸⁴ Poythress, “Hermeneutical Factors,” 146–49.

⁸⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 618.

⁸⁶ Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, 280–87.

⁸⁷ Helen K. Bond, “Dating the Death of Jesus: Memory and the Religious Imagination,” *NTS* 59.4 (2013): 461–75.