

DECREE OR NOT?

From the issuing of the **decree** [margin: *word*; Hebrew: *dābār*] to **restore** [Hebrew: *šûb*] and **rebuild** [Hebrew: *bānâ*] **Jerusalem** until the Anointed One, [margin: *an anointed one*; Hebrew: *māšîaḥ*] the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with **streets** and a **trench**, but in times of trouble.¹

Three key words are:

- *dābār* (the decree)
- *šûb* (to restore)
- *bānâ* (to rebuild).

Each word relates to “Jerusalem”. Since it “will be rebuilt with streets and a trench”, this shows that these three words are referring to the City.

dābār

dābar (verb) and *dābār* (noun) together appear some 2500 times in the Hebrew Scripture. Of these appearances, they are translated as: word (339 times); words (226); said (197), speak (170); spoken (99); spoke (85); say (76); and so on. *dābār* is rendered as “decree” on two occasions², while *dābar* is so rendered just once³.

The verb *dābar* (“say, speak”) and the noun *dābār* (“word”) are both used hundreds of times for the human and the divine activity of speaking. The verb occurs in speaking in dialog within a narrative. It is also used in the formula found numerous times in the prophets, “The Lord has *spoken*”.⁴

When Scripture says, “the *word* [*dābār*] of the Lord”, this brings with it the sense of supreme and unassailable authority of the highest degree. When the Lord speaks, whatever he declares, it is his command, his decree, his proclamation. The words, commands, declarations, decrees, and proclamations of man are subservient to and consequential to anything that comes from the Lord.

Not only is Daniel’s prayer interrupted by an angelic “**word**” which “goes forth” (דַּבַּר יִצֵּא) at the same time Daniel responds to his reading of the “**word**” of Jeremiah (9:22–23), but **more importantly, the starting point of the “seventy weeks” is identified similarly, as “the going forth of a word (דַּבַּר יִצֵּא) to restore and to build Jerusalem” (9:25).**

Inasmuch as the term used **in each of these references is the common דַּבַּר (*dābār* “word”)** and not מִצְוָה (“command”), **as many English versions imply,** there is no need to read into the passage the meaning of a “royal decree” issued by a Persian ruler.⁵

¹ Dan. 9:25

² Esther 1:19; Dan. 9:25; The word translated as “are decreed” at Daniel 9:24 is *ḥātak*, while at Daniel 9:26, 27 the word rendered as “decreed” is *ḥāraṣ*.

³ Jer. 51:12

⁴ Mounce, pp. 801-802, art., “Word”

⁵ Pierce, pp. 212-213.

The Lord would “restore” [šûb] the land and his people

“Restore” [šûb] at Daniel 9:25

From the issuing of the decree (*word*) to **restore** [Hebrew: *šûb*] ... **Jerusalem**.

The Lord’s decree to “restore” [šûb] as given through Jeremiah

Therefore this is what the LORD says: “If you repent, I will **restore [šûb] you** that you may **serve me**.”⁶

For I will **restore [šûb]** them to the **land** I gave their forefathers.⁷

“They will be taken to Babylon and there they will remain until the day I come for them,” declares the LORD. “Then I will bring them back and **restore [šûb] them to this place**.”⁸

‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and **restore [šûb]** them to the **land** I gave their forefathers to possess,’ says the LORD.”⁹

This is what the LORD says: “I will **restore [šûb]** the fortunes of Jacob’s tents and have compassion on his dwellings; the city will be rebuilt [*bānâ*] on her ruins [*tēl*], and the palace will stand in its proper place.”¹⁰

I have surely heard Ephraim’s moaning: “You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. **Restore [šûb]** me, and I will return, because you are the LORD my God.”¹¹

Fields will be bought for silver, and deeds will be signed, sealed and witnessed in the territory of Benjamin, in the villages around Jerusalem, in the towns of Judah and in the towns of the hill country, of the western foothills and of the Negev, because I will **restore [šûb]** their fortunes, declares the LORD.”¹²

This is what the LORD says: “You say about this place, ‘It is a **desolate (*hārēb*)** waste, without men or animals.’ ” Yet in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are **deserted (*sāmēm*)**, **inhabited (*yāsab*)** by neither men nor animals, there will be heard once more the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, and the voices of those who bring thank offerings to the house of the LORD, saying, “Give thanks to the LORD Almighty, for the LORD is good; his love endures forever. For I will **restore [šûb]** the fortunes of the land as they were before,” says the LORD.¹³

Have you not noticed that these people are saying, “The LORD has rejected the two kingdoms he chose”? ... This is what the LORD says: “... I will **restore [šûb]** their fortunes and have compassion on them.”¹⁴

⁶ Jer. 15:19

⁷ Jer. 16:15

⁸ Jer. 27:22

⁹ Jer. 30:3

¹⁰ Jer. 30:18

¹¹ Jer. 31:18

¹² Jer. 32:44

¹³ Jer. 33:10-11

¹⁴ Jer. 33:24-26

The Lord would “rebuild” [bānâ]

“Rebuild [bānâ] Jerusalem” at Daniel 9:25

From the issuing of the decree [margin: *word*; Hebrew: *dābār*] to ... **rebuild** [Hebrew: *bānâ*] **Jerusalem**.

The Lord’s decree to “rebuild” [bānâ] as given through Isaiah

I will raise up Cyrus¹⁵ in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will **rebuild [bānâ] my city** and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty.¹⁶

Your people will **rebuild [bānâ]** the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.¹⁷

Foreigners will **rebuild [bānâ] your walls**, and their kings will serve you. Though in anger I struck you, in favor I will show you compassion.¹⁸

They will **rebuild [bānâ] the ancient ruins** and **restore [qûm]** the places **long devastated [sāmēm]**; they will **renew [ḥādas]** the **ruined cities** that have been **devastated [sāmēm]** for **generations**.¹⁹

The Lord’s decree to “rebuild” [bānâ] as given through Jeremiah

I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and will **rebuild [bānâ]** them as they were before.²⁰

The Lord’s decree to “rebuild” [bānâ] as given at Psalms

Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and all that move in them, for God will save Zion and **rebuild [bānâ]** the cities of Judah. Then people will settle there and possess it; the children of his servants will inherit it, and those who love his name will dwell there.²¹

For the LORD will **rebuild [bānâ] Zion** and appear in his glory. He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; he will not despise their plea.²²

Cyrus’ “proclamation” [qôl]

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order **to fulfill the word [dābār] of the LORD** spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a **proclamation** [Hebrew: *qôl*²³] throughout his realm and to put it in writing. This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: “The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and **he has appointed me to build** a **temple** for him at Jerusalem in Judah.”²⁴

The Hebrew writers thus state that Cyrus was the instrument used by the Lord to carry out the command that originated from him.

¹⁵ The Hebrew renders this with “him”.

¹⁶ Isa. 45:13

¹⁷ Isa. 58:12

¹⁸ Isa. 60:10

¹⁹ Isa. 61:4

²⁰ Jer. 33:7

²¹ Psa. 69:34-36

²² Psa. 102:16-17

²³ “Sound, voice, noise”

²⁴ Ezra 1:2-4

This “proclamation” (*qôl*) by Cyrus is to a Hebrew naturally subservient to and consequential on the “word [*dābār*] of the LORD”. And it is clearly stated that the “word of the LORD” that Cyrus was carrying out is to be found at Jeremiah.

Some consider that these words were obtained from the building inscription placed in the temple at Jerusalem by the Hebrew people. That would explain why this passage says “temple” whereas at Daniel 9:25, Gabriel says “Jerusalem ... street ... trench”.

Consistent with a building inscription for a temple of YHWH in Jerusalem, it was written by and for Jews. The language is Hebrew, the reference to Jeremiah is relevant only to Jews, and the phrase “to stir up the spirit” is a Hebraism.²⁵

At the time, those kings were not known with the title “king of Persia”, which strongly supports the contention of a composition from a later time, probably during the reign of Artaxerxes.

The title [“king of Persia”] is never used in any of Cyrus’s inscriptions and is not used for Achaemenid kings before Darius I. ... This is precisely when the inscription must have been written – the 6th year of Darius I, at the time of the temple’s dedication (Ezra 6:15).²⁶

On the cylinder that bears his name, Cyrus actually wrote (in part):

When I entered Babilani as a friend and when I established the seat of the government in the palace of the ruler under jubilation and rejoicing, Marduk, the great lord, induced the magnanimous inhabitants of Babilani to love me, and I was daily endeavoring to worship him. ...

As to the region from as far as Assura and Susa, Akkade, Eshnunna, the towns Zamban, Me-turnu, Der as well as the region of the Gutians, I returned to these sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which used to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I also gathered all their former inhabitants and returned them to their habitations. Furthermore, I resettled upon the command of Marduk, the great lord, all the gods of Kiengir and Akkade whom Nabonidus had brought into Babilani to the anger of the lord of the gods, unharmed, in their former temples, the places which make them happy.

Some consider the Cylinder to be a temple building inscription for Cyrus’s god, Marduk.

Kuhrt and others have shown that the famous Cyrus Cylinder is a foundation document for the restoration of the Esagil, the temple of Marduk in Babylon.²⁷

With his theological intention clearly to the fore, the writer of Ezra places the *ʔeʔem* (“command”) of God paramount in importance and thus in time, which makes the *ʔeʔem* (“decrees”) of the Persian kings consequential to God’s initiating command.

They finished building the **temple** according to the **command** [Aramaic: *ʔeʔem*²⁸] of the God of Israel and the **decrees** [Aramaic: *ʔeʔem*] of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia.²⁹

²⁵ Fried, pp. 35-36.

²⁶ Fried, p. 36

²⁷ Fried, p. 36

²⁸ In Hebrew: *ʔaʔam*: “taste; discretion; discernment; decree; judgment”

²⁹ Ezr 6:14

Darius' (522-486 BCE) "order"

The work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill [during the reign of Artaxerxes] until the **second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.** ...

Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, helping them.

At that time Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates went to them and asked, "Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and restore this structure?" ... But the eye of their God was watching over the elders of the Jews, and they were not stopped until a report could go to Darius and his written reply be received.

This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates, the officials of Trans-Euphrates, sent to King **Darius.**

The report they sent him read as follows:

To King Darius:

Cordial greetings.

The king should know that we went to the district of Judah, to the temple of the great God. The people are building it with large stones and placing the timbers in the walls. The work is being carried on with diligence and is making rapid progress under their direction.

We questioned the elders and asked them, "Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and restore this structure?" ... This is the answer they gave us: ...

"In the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a **decree [Aramaic: ʔēʾēm]** to rebuild this house of God. He even removed from the temple of Babylon the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to the temple in Babylon. Then King **Cyrus gave them to a man named Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed governor,** and he told him, 'Take these articles and go and deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem. And **rebuild [Aramaic: bēnâ ³⁰]** the house of God on its site.' So this Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the house of God in Jerusalem. From that day to the present it has been under construction but is not yet finished.

Now if it pleases the king, let a search be made in the royal archives of Babylon to see if King Cyrus did in fact issue a **decree** to **rebuild this house of God** in Jerusalem. Then let the king send us his decision in this matter."

King Darius then issued an **order [Aramaic: ʔēʾēm]**, and they searched in the archives stored in the treasury at Babylon. A scroll was found in the citadel of Ecbatana in the province of Media, and this was written on it:

Memorandum [Aramaic: *dikrôn*]

In the first year of King Cyrus, the king issued a **decree [Aramaic: ʔēʾēm]** concerning the temple of God in Jerusalem:

³⁰ Hebrew: *bānâ* "to make, build, rebuild, to be built, established."

Let the temple be rebuilt as a place to present sacrifices, and let its foundations be laid. It is to be ninety feet high and ninety feet wide, with three courses of large stones and one of timbers. The costs are to be paid by the royal treasury.

Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, are to be returned to their places in the temple in Jerusalem; they are to be deposited in the house of God.

Now then, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and you, their fellow officials of that province, stay away from there. Do not interfere with the work on this temple of God. Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this house of God on its site.

Moreover, I hereby decree [Aramaic: *ṭē'ēm + šîm (to place, issue)*] what you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of this house of God:

The expenses of these men are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates, so that the work will not stop. Whatever is needed—young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem—must be given them daily without fail, so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons.

Furthermore, I decree [Aramaic: *ṭē'ēm + šîm*] that if anyone changes this edict [Aramaic:], a beam is to be pulled from his house and he is to be lifted up and impaled on it. And for this crime his house is to be made a pile of rubble.

May God, who has caused his Name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem.

I Darius have decreed it [Aramaic: *ṭē'ēm + šîm*]. Let it be carried out with diligence.³¹

This “decree” of Darius to Ezra is thus subsequent to and a result of a letter from Cyrus to a personal letter to a governor, Sheshbazzar.

According to Ezra 1:1, 2, a herald announced the decision to rebuild the Temple throughout the kingdom and there was also a written document; this last remark stated almost as an afterthought (Ezra 1:1). A written document disseminated throughout the kingdom is not likely. Had there been one, the Jews would have been able to present it to Tattenai when he requested it [At that time Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates went to them and asked, “Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and restore this structure?” (Ezra 5:3)]

It was lack of a written edict that necessitated Tattenai's letter to Darius. ... More likely, the situation was as described in Tattenai's letter to Darius: Cyrus gave an order to Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed governor, to take

³¹ Ezra 4:24; 5:2-3, 5-9, 11-17; 6:1-12

YHWH's vessels from the Esagil to Jerusalem, to rebuild the Temple there, and to install the vessels in it. Presumably Sheshbazzar did not go alone but brought with him a contingent of Jews. The phrase **𐤀𐤏𐤍 𐤀𐤔** in Tattenai's letter is used throughout Arsames' letters to **indicate a simple command to a subordinate**. There is no mention in either Tattenai's letter to Darius or in Darius's response of an order to anyone but Sheshbazzar. Had there been a general edict, the Jews certainly would have retained a copy of it.

The language of these two verses fits the language of a building inscription; it **does not fit the language or idioms of an official Persian edict**.³²

Artaxerxes' (465-424 BCE) in 7th year, letter to Ezra

[Ezra] came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. ... This is a **copy of the letter King Artaxerxes had given to Ezra** ...:

Artaxerxes, king of kings,

To **Ezra** the priest, a teacher of the Law of the God of heaven: Greetings.

Now I **decree** [Aramaic: *ṭē'em + šim*] that any of the Israelites in my kingdom, including priests and Levites, **who wish to go to Jerusalem with you, may go**.

You are sent by the king and his seven advisers **to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God**, which is in your hand.

Moreover, you are to take with you the silver and gold that the king and his advisers have freely given to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, together with all the silver and gold you may obtain from the province of Babylon, as well as the freewill offerings of the people and priests for the temple of their God in Jerusalem.

With this money be sure to **buy bulls, rams and male lambs, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings, and sacrifice them on the altar of the temple of your God in Jerusalem**.

You and your brother Jews may then do whatever seems best with the rest of the silver and gold, in accordance with the will of your God. Deliver to the God of Jerusalem all the articles entrusted to you for worship in the temple of your God. And anything else needed for the temple of your God that you may have occasion to supply, you may provide from the royal treasury.

Now I, King Artaxerxes, **order** [Aramaic: *ṭē'em + šim*] all the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates to provide with diligence whatever Ezra the priest, a teacher of the Law of the God of heaven, may ask of you—up to a hundred talents of silver, a hundred cors of wheat, a hundred baths of wine, a hundred baths of olive oil, and salt without limit.

Whatever the God of heaven has prescribed³³ [Aramaic: *ṭē'em + min*], let it be done with diligence for the temple of the God

³² Fried, pp. 37-38

³³ **Thus showing that the command by God is the initiating instruction.**

of heaven. Why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and of his sons?

You are also to know that you have no authority to impose taxes, tribute or duty on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, temple servants or other workers at this house of God. And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates—all who know the laws of your God. And you are to teach any who do not know them.

Whoever does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king must surely be punished by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment.³⁴

Artaxerxes' (465-424 BCE) in 20th year, decree to Nehemiah

In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before; so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.” I was very much afraid, but I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when **the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?**”

The king said to me, “What is it you want?” Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried **so that I can rebuild it.**”

Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, “How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?” It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time.

I also said to him, “If it pleases the king, **may I have letters [Hebrew: 'iggeret] to the governors** of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And **may I have a letter [Hebrew: 'iggeret] to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?**” And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the **king granted my requests.**

So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and **gave them the king's letters [Hebrew: 'iggeret]**. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me. When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.

I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone **what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem**. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.

By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been

³⁴ Ezra 7:7, 11-26

destroyed by fire. Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate.

The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins [Hebrew: *ḥārēb*³⁵] and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace."

I also told them about **the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me**. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work. (Neh. 2:1-18)

This shows that although Jerusalem was in ruins, people were living there.

The declarations to rebuild

The words on the Cyrus Cylinder show that Cyrus did not specifically mention rebuilding Jerusalem, and there is no mention of it in the letter of Artaxerxes.³⁶ It is highly unlikely that a heathen king would be given such an authority, as so much is conveyed with the "restoration" and "rebuilding" of a people as well as of a city.

It is thus most likely that the *dābār* ("word") at Daniel 9:25 refers to the utterance of God through Jeremiah, in which God said he would restore the city, the land and the people. That is where Daniel would have read of the word being given to rebuild.

The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the **land** I gave their forefathers to possess,' says the LORD."

These are the words the LORD spoke concerning Israel and Judah: "This is what the LORD says:

" 'In that day,' declares the LORD Almighty, 'I will break the yoke off their necks and will tear off their bonds; no longer will foreigners enslave them ... I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,' declares the LORD, 'because you are called an outcast, Zion for whom no one cares.' "This is what the LORD says: " 'I will restore the fortunes of Jacob's tents and have compassion on his dwellings; **the city will be rebuilt on her ruins**, and the palace will stand in its proper place." ...

"You will be my **people**, and I will be your God. ... **I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt** ... "They will return from the land of the enemy. So there is hope for your future," declares the LORD. "Your children will return to their own land." ...

"Return, O Virgin Israel, return to your towns." ...

"This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "When I bring them back from captivity, the **people** in the **land** of Judah and in its towns will once again use these words: 'The LORD bless you, O righteous dwelling, O **sacred mountain**.'

³⁵ *dry, desolate, wasted, in ruins*; the Hebrew word *ḥorbâ* is directly related

³⁶ Ezra 7

People will live together in Judah and all its towns—farmers and those who move about with their flocks. I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint.”³⁷

The lengths of the decreed periods

“Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to

- finish transgression,
- put an end to sin,
- atone for wickedness,
- bring in everlasting righteousness,
- seal up vision and prophecy and
- anoint the most holy.

“Know and understand this:

- From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.
- After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing.
- The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.
 - He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’
 - In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering.
 - And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation,
 - until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.³⁸

The last four verses present the most difficult text in the book, as commentators agree, but they most certainly do not agree as to the right way to understand the figures given. Where others have failed it would be presumptuous to assume that one more commentator will succeed. All one can do is to continue to apply agreed criteria as consistently as possible, weigh carefully the conclusions of others, and make suggestions as to the most likely solution to a difficult problem.³⁹

Daniel’s prayer answered

While Daniel was still praying, confessing the nation’s sin and requesting God’s good favour upon his “holy hill”, Gabriel came to him with the answer.

While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for his holy hill — while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice.

³⁷ Jer. 30:3-5, 8, 17-18, 22; 31:4, 16, 21, 23-25

³⁸ Dan. 9:24-27

³⁹ Baldwin, *Daniel*, p. 163

He instructed me and said to me, “Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding (*bînâ*⁴⁰). As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand (*bîn*) the vision”.⁴¹

Actions demanded of God’s people

The answer came that, although Daniel’s prayer had been heard, the people and the holy city had not yet put an end to their sinful ways. For this reason, their punishment would continue.

Although the people were now permitted to return, Judah would continue to experience subservience, this time for a longer period, and no longer to an earthly nation but to the Lord himself. While Daniel’s confessional prayer had achieved one objective, the rest of the nation had not learned its lesson and hence was deserving of further testing and punishing.

They had still failed to change their ways, and now the nation would be required to serve for a period seven times longer (as per Leviticus 26) – 7 times 70 – but this time their servitude was to God. During this greater period of punishment, the nation was to demonstrate that it had truly changed its relationship towards him.

“Seventy ‘sevens’ are **decreed for your people and your holy city** to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.⁴²

Although Daniel had sought and obtained the permission for God’s people to return, this was not a national act of contrition, it was not made by the temple’s priesthood. God responded that the nation and the temple would need to demonstrate genuine repentance and religious functioning. For this, God decreed that the people and the holy city were commanded to:

- finish transgression,
- put an end to sin,
- atone for wickedness,
- bring in everlasting righteousness,
- seal up⁴³ vision and prophecy and
- anoint the most holy.⁴⁴

“Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild **Jerusalem** until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’⁴⁵

If the going forth of God’s word through Jeremiah was given at the start of Babylon’s regional dominance (changeover from Nabopolassar to Nebuchadnezzar), then the end of the seven ‘sevens’, which presumably means 49 years, is aligned to the time when Cyrus was enthroned as king of Persia.

If, however, that 49 year period began when Jerusalem was destroyed, then it ended when Cyrus entered victoriously into Babylon. He *was* the Anointed One, according to (trito-) Isaiah⁴⁶ and he took over the throne of Babylon in Nisan (April) 538 BCE. During the period

⁴⁰ The same word is used at Dan. 1:20

⁴¹ Dan. 9:20-23

⁴² Dan. 9:24

⁴³ “Seal up” could be understood legalistically, in that through their behavior, the people placed the seal on these documents which confirmed their acceptance of them through their upright relationship towards the Lord.

⁴⁴ Would a cynic say that these words were written by the ideologues, the puritanical Jews, in an effort to enshrine their own power and influence?

⁴⁵ Dan. 9:25

⁴⁶ Isa. 45:1; written at the time of the Babylonian exile.

from the Fall of Babylon until his inauguration as its monarch, in accordance with the practice of Accession-year reckoning, Cyrus completed the final year of its previous monarch, Nabonidus. Jerusalem was destroyed 49 years previously, in 587 BCE.

The 62 'sevens', namely the 434 years that followed these 49 years, terminated at the time of the difficulties experienced by God's people during the second century BCE, the details of which are beyond the scope of this Study. Suffice to say, this latter Anointed One of the 2nd century BCE would bring destruction, a cessation of Jewish sacrificial ceremonies and religious offerings, and would place an abomination at a wing of the temple until he would be brought to the end he deserved.

"After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.

"He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.'"⁴⁷

Whatever interpretation is given to these verses of Daniel, that interpretation needs to comply with the criteria of this decree from God as delivered by Gabriel.

In reality, Gabriel's information is sufficiently loose to permit a range of solutions. Such uncertainties with Daniel illustrate the need for caution with the book. To have one's faith depend on one particular interpretation of Daniel is fraught with difficulty.

It is possible to be so preoccupied with numbers as to miss the essential truth which those numbers declare.⁴⁸

This emphasises the great danger of basing one's faith on dates and chronologies, and on relying on the interpretation of vague, obscure and problematic passages.

⁴⁷ Daniel 9:24-27

⁴⁸ Baldwin, *Daniel*, p. 164