# “Seventy Sevens”

*Robert Wills, 16th November 2026*

Introduction

In the book of Daniel chapter 9, there’s an astonishing prophecy about the timing of the crucifixion of Christ almost 500 years in Daniel’s future.

I think it’s not as well known as it should be. It almost gets played down among Christians because it has some obscure features which people argue over, and most of us sensibly don’t get into those arguments. The basic features of the prophecy, though, are fairly straightforward, and a bit of simple arithmetic can show us something astonishing which should be a great encouragement to our faith.

Daniel 9:-

> 20 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— 21 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. 22 He instructed me and said to me, “Daniel, I have
> now come to give you insight and understanding. 23 As soon as you
> began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for
> you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the word and
> understand the vision:
>
> 24 “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 Place.
>
> 25 “Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out 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. 26 After the

> sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be put to death 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. [27] 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 at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.”

Anointed One

Daniel, who was an exile from Judaea in Babylon in the 6th Century BC, was given this prophecy about the Messiah. Both “Christ” in Greek and “Messiah” in Hebrew mean “Anointed One”.

The timescale given in the prophecy starts from the decree to “restore and rebuild Jerusalem”. There are at least three candidates for this decree, spanning 93 years.

- The Decree of Cyrus (c. 538–536 BC): King Cyrus the Great of Persia allowed Jewish exiles to return to Judea and funded the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1–4).

- The Decree of Artaxerxes I (457 BC): Artaxerxes granted Ezra authority to restore civil government, religious worship, and the community. (Ezra 7).

- The Sending of Nehemiah (c. 445–445 BC): Nehemiah travelled to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls and gates. (Nehemiah 3, 6:15).

People usually accept that it’s right to focus on the 457BC date because the decree of Cyrus only referred to building the temple (so not the entire city of Jerusalem) and the later sending of Nehemiah wasn’t really a formal decree.

In Hebrew, seventy “sevens” means 70×7 or 490 years. Each “seven” is a 7-year period.

The 70 “sevens” in the prophecy are divided into 7 “sevens”, 62 “sevens” and a final “seven”.

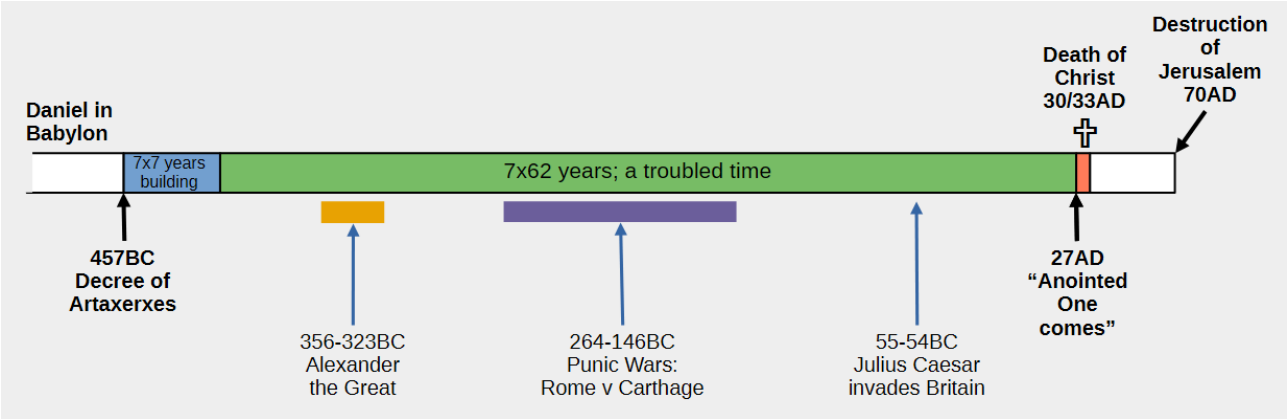
At the end of the 7 and 62 “sevens”, Daniel was told that “the Anointed One comes”. From 457BC, adding 7×7+62×7 years gets us to 27AD. (Not 26AD because there was no year 0 between BC and AD).

Daniel was therefore told that the Messiah would come in 27AD. As we know, Christ was present in that year and it would have been about when He started His ministry, first being baptised by John the Baptist.

In addition, Daniel was also told that “after the sixty-two ‘sevens’ the Anointed One will be put to death”. This would have been more surprising to him; he wouldn’t have been expecting to hear of the Messiah being killed! From our perspective, though, we know how this happened.

The events of the final “seven” are obscure, but it’s reasonable to interpret verses 26 & 27 as meaning that the death of the Anointed One is within this final “seven”. That’s between 28 and 34AD. This covers the possible dates for the death of Christ! The usual dates given for His death are 30 or 33AD, at Passover.

Here is a simple diagram of the 490 years. I’ve added a few events we might remember from school history to give it perspective.



It’s hardly possible to overstate how astonishing this is. Back in the sixth century BC, Daniel recorded a prediction given to him by Gabriel, giving the time when the Messiah would appear and be killed. With hindsight we now see that the prediction is correct!

Some people try to get their calculations to come to an exact year, but I note that the unit of measurement in the prophecy is seven years, and fractions weren’t in common use in Daniel’s time. I’m therefore sufficiently impressed that the prophecy encompasses the Messiah’s death to within a seven-year period.

Desolation

That was all fairly simple calculation. Verse 27 is definitely the hardest to interpret, and what follows is more speculative.

“The people of the ruler who will come” are usually identified as the Romans (who weren’t a powerful people in Daniel’s time), because they did in fact destroy Jerusalem and its temple in 70AD.

The big question which is debated a lot is, who is “he” who will confirm a covenant and put an end to sacrifices in v27? On the face of it, in the NIV, “he” is “the ruler”. But that relies on English translation and punctuation. According to scholars there are two possibilities:

- The Roman general Titus in 70AD did indeed put an end to sacrifices, by destroying the temple.

- Christ, in His death, made sacrifices and offerings irrelevant, so He also put an end to them. We would say that His death confirmed a covenant too.

My view is that there’s an intended double meaning, and the prophecy covers both of those ideas. Sacrifices become unnecessary and are also forcibly stopped. A covenant is made.

What about the “abomination that causes desolation” in v27? This also is debated. The basic meaning is that the temple is desecrated.

Titus did that by destroying it, but there was a striking prelude: on arriving in Jerusalem he brought the Roman standards into the temple and had his Roman soldiers burning incense to them, which horrified the Jews.

It had another effect too. Remember that in Matthew 24 Jesus told His followers, “When you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”

This is recorded as having happened. Eusebius says that when the Christians in Jerusalem realised that the Romans were desecrating the temple, they remembered Jesus’ warning and fled the city. This meant that they escaped the terrible final siege when Roman soldiers surrounded the ruined city and killed anyone trying to leave it.

Having said all that, there are probably things going on in the last verse that I haven’t covered. Some people link them to the final return of Christ. These things are debatable and I’m avoiding argument here.

<u>Sacrifices</u>

So, it’s a remarkable thing: Daniel was told with considerable accuracy when the Messiah would come, and that He would be killed. But let’s not overlook what we’re told this is all about; what the Messiah accomplishes in fulfilling this prophecy. We’ve already seen that He ends sacrifices and offerings. From the New Testament, we now understand how: He renders them obsolete by *being* the ultimate sacrifice Himself.

The Messiah’s ability to remove the need for sacrifices wasn’t quite revealed to Daniel, but it’s hinted at in Gabriel’s opening words: “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…*”

The New Testament expands on what it means to say that Christ has put and end to sacrifices and offerings, put an end to sin and atoned for wickedness. In Hebrews chapter 9:-

> [12] He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. [13] The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. [14] How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!
>
> [15] For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.
>
> [26] ... he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

This cleansed conscience, freedom from sin and eternal inheritance is what we receive when we put our faith in Christ, the Anointed One who died for us at the right time predicted by Gabriel to Daniel.