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## The Prophecy of Prophecies: Correcting Harold Hoehner's Interpretation of Daniel's 70 Weeks

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## The Prophecy of Prophecies: Correcting Harold Hoehner's Interpretation of Daniel's 70 Weeks

### Abstract

Attacks against the Bible's divine inspiration are rampant in today's society. One of the most popular apologetic methods used to defend the doctrine of inspiration is messianic prophecy. Though many predictions fulfilled by Jesus Christ have been identified, no prediction found in the Old Testament is quite as precise or as controversial as the prophecy of Daniel's 70 weeks. While various interpretations of Daniel 9:24-27 have been promoted, this article defends the interpretation popularized by Harold Hoehner as the most convincing. Though Hoehner may have provided the most accurate interpretation historically, the purpose of this article is to correct mistakes present in Hoehner's calculations and thus provide a completely accurate position on the subject.

### Keywords

Apologetics, prophecy, messianic prophecy, Daniel, Daniel's 70 weeks, inspiration, Harold Hoehner

### Cover Page Footnote

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## Introduction

It is evident that the authors of both Old and New Testaments believed their writings were inspired by God. The apostle Paul claimed that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16, *KJV*),<sup>1</sup> John recorded Jesus as designating the OT as the very “word of God” (John 10:35), and multiple OT prophets explicitly claimed they were writing on Yahweh’s behalf (cf. Jer. 1:4; Ezek. 12:1; Zech. 4:8; etc.). One of the most significant evidences for the divine inspiration of the biblical canon can be found in the prophecy of Daniel’s 70 weeks (cf. Dan. 9:24-27). Though a fairly accurate interpretation of this prophecy was published in 1881 by Sir Robert Anderson in his book *The Coming Prince*, Anderson’s work was later improved upon by theologian Harold Hoehner. While Hoehner’s position has exceeded Anderson’s as the popular choice, his revision is not without error. The purpose of this article is to correct mistakes present in Hoehner’s calculations and thus provide a completely accurate position on the subject. After explaining the context of Daniel 9:24-27, this article will examine the details of Daniel’s 70-week prophecy and establish variables necessary for proper interpretation of the text. An interpretation that is both textually and historically accurate will then be presented, followed by an assessment of the calculations promoted by Anderson and Hoehner. The article will also consider the practical benefits of a proper understanding of Daniel 9:24-27 before concluding.

## Context of Daniel 9:24-27

Daniel 9 begins by noting that the historical setting was “in the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans” (Dan. 9:1). Because Darius, the same king who is recorded as having Daniel thrown into the lion’s den (cf. Dan. 6:9-16), was appointed ruler directly after the Persian conquest of Babylon (cf. Dan. 5:31), this would imply a date of 539 BC for chapter 9 of Daniel. However, since extrabiblical evidence for Darius the Mede is absent, some scholars believe that Daniel’s use of the phrase ‘Darius the Mede’ is a reference to the Persian general named Gubaru or to Cyrus himself. Biblical scholar Joyce Baldwin favors the latter option by claiming that while “there is no evidence that Gubaru was a Mede, called king, named Darius, son of Ahasuerus, or aged about sixty, Cyrus is known to have been related to the Medes, to have been called ‘king of the Medes’ and to have been about sixty years old on becoming king of Babylon.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture referenced utilizes the *King James Version*.

<sup>2</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 30.

Regardless of the true identity of Darius the Mede, Persia's conquest of Babylon marked a turning point in history because it resulted in the termination of Israel's strict captivity under the Babylonians.

Daniel explains that during Darius' first year of reign, he "understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolation of Jerusalem" (Dan. 9:2). Daniel is referring here to Jeremiah's prediction during the seventh century BC that the Israelites "shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years... it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I [Yahweh] will punish the king of Babylon" (Jer. 25:11-12). What makes this incident especially miraculous for those who adhere to the traditional view of biblical authorship is that more than 100 years prior to the Persian conquest of Babylon, the prophet Isaiah specifically referred to Cyrus *by name* and predicted his role in enabling Israel to flourish and rebuild the temple (cf. Isa. 44:28, 45:1; Ezra 1:1). Furthermore, Isaiah applied the title of *mashiach* (מָשִׁיחַ) to Cyrus, a Gentile king – this is exceptionally unique because the title of Yahweh's Messiah, or 'anointed one,' is primarily understood by Christians to refer to Jesus and "within the OT itself the word's regular use applies to the Davidic king, so it is also scandalous in that context."<sup>3</sup>

Though Daniel understood that Israel's release from captivity was imminent based on the writings of Jeremiah, he nevertheless humbled himself in prayer, fasting, and the putting on of sackcloth and ashes in order to ask Yahweh for forgiveness of the collective sin committed by Israel (cf. Dan. 9:3-19). While Daniel was deep in prayer, however, his focus was interrupted by the archangel Gabriel. Daniel explains that "whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel... informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding" (Dan. 9:21-22). The information that Gabriel proceeded to communicate to Daniel may qualify as the most extraordinary passage in the entire Bible.

### Gabriel's Message

The primary substance of Gabriel's message to Daniel can be found in verses 24-27, which state the following:

Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to

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<sup>3</sup> John Goldingay, *Isaiah*, Understanding the Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 391.

anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

It should be noted that even though Gabriel described a timeline of 70 weeks, there is a distinction made between the first 69 weeks and the last week. This can be established by three details, those being (1) it is explicitly stated that Messiah will be cut off “seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks [69 weeks total]” (v. 25) after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem has been issued, (2) since the abomination of desolation will take place during the last of the 70 weeks, this week *must* occur directly before Jesus’ second coming (cf. Matt. 24:15-31), and (3) the termination of the last week will result in “an end of sin” (v. 24), which has not yet been fulfilled. Since the scope of the 70<sup>th</sup> week is an entirely separate study in itself, the rest of this article will focus primarily on the first 69 weeks of Gabriel’s timeline.

Now that particular importance of the first 69 weeks of Daniel’s 70-week prophecy has been established, these 69 weeks must be properly defined. It is crucial to note that the Hebrew word translated as *week* (שבוע) simply refers to a set of seven – the Torah describes weeks of days (cf. Ex. 20:11), weeks of weeks (cf. Lev. 23:16), and weeks of years (cf. Duet. 15:1). OT scholar William Nelson states that these seventy sets of seven are “usually construed by commentators as seventy weeks of years... Thus, the total number of years is seventy times seven, or 490 years... This interpretation makes the most sense.”<sup>4</sup> However, recognizing these weeks as sets of seven years does not resolve every variable because the modern definition of a *year* is based on the Gregorian calendar, which was introduced in AD 1582 – nearly two millennia after Daniel lived.

There is considerable support that a *biblical year* is 360 days and consists of 12 months of 30 days each. For example, Genesis states that the water of

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<sup>4</sup> William B. Nelson, *Daniel*, Understanding the Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 232-233.

Noah's flood began to rise during the seventeenth day of the second month and that the ark finally rested on the seventeenth day of the seventh month (cf. Gen. 7:11, 8:4). Hence, there was exactly five months between the rise of the waters and the resting of the ark. Since these five months are equated to "[one] hundred and fifty days" (Gen. 8:3), Genesis appears to utilize 30-day months. The 360-day year is especially supported in Revelation when 1,260 days, 42 months, and 3.5 years are all compared to each other (cf. Rev. 11:2-3, 12:6-14). A 360-day year consisting of 12 months of 30 days each enables the mathematics of this comparison to succeed, seeing as 1,260 days divided by 42 months equals 30 days, while 1,260 days divided by 3.5 years equals 360 days per year. When considering the language used in Revelation, it appears that the book of Daniel also implies a 360-day year. Even though Daniel lived centuries before John, the author of Revelation, both authors use identical language when describing a specific period of 3.5 years during the end times. Daniel uses the term "a time, times, and a half" (Dan. 12:14; cf. Dan. 7:25), while John uses the phrase "a time, and times, and half a time" (Rev. 12:14). Since both of these books are apocalyptic in nature and describe similar events, hermeneutical consistency demands that they have identical definitions for a *year*.

Extrabiblical evidence for the ancient use of a 360-day year can be found in Babylonian tablets which predate the seventh century BC. Concerning said tablets, historians Hunger and Steele note that "in the schematic calendar, months are assumed to always contain 30 days, and the year to contain 12 months, making a total of 360 days in a year."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the apocryphal book of Enoch alludes to the common use of a 360-day year. Sacha Stern, Head of the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at UCL, notes that "although in 1 Enoch the 364-day year is presented mainly as an astronomical scheme, it seems also to be favoured as a calendar for people to use... It is contrasted with a 360-day calendar... which some (or all?) people are criticized for using (75: 1-2, 82: 4-6)."<sup>6</sup>

While there is convincing evidence for the ancient use of a 360-day year, the fact that Daniel and Revelation both use the same language concerning time further implies that Daniel and John were operating with the same calendar in mind. Affirming the position that a biblical year is indeed 360 days, Daniel's 69 weeks of years can be converted into 173,880 days – 69 sets of seven years is

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<sup>5</sup> Hermann Hunger and John Steele, *The Babylonian Astronomical Compendium MUL.APIN*, Scientific Writings from the Ancient and Medieval World (New York: Routledge, 2019), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Sacha Stern, *Calendars in Antiquity: Empires, States, and Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 194.

equal to 483 total years, while 483 years consisting of 360 days equals 173,880 total days.

### **The *Terminus a Quo* of Gabriel's Messianic Countdown**

Since Gabriel states that the Messiah will be cut off 69 weeks after “the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem” (v. 25), a significant variable that must be established is the date when said commandment took place. Historically, there has been competition between three different dates as the starting point to Gabriel's countdown, those being (1) 537 BC (cf. Ezra 1:1-4), (2) 457 BC (cf. Ezra 7:11-26), and (3) 444 BC (cf. Neh. 2:1-9). Each of these possibilities will now be examined in light of the textual and historical evidence.

#### 537 BC (Ezra 1:1-4)

The book of Ezra begins by affirming Daniel's interpretation of Jeremiah's prophecy that Israel will be freed after 70 years of captivity – as noted earlier, Isaiah correctly predicted that this would take place under Cyrus (cf. Isa. 44:28, 45:1; Ezra 1:1). Cyrus' decree to Israel is described in Ezra 1:1-4:

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom... Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah... let him [any Israelite] go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel... and whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

Ezra is quite transparent that Cyrus' commandment focused exclusively on “the house of the Lord God of Israel” (v. 3), as evidenced by the mention of precious metals and animals for religious purposes. Therefore, the description of Cyrus' decree fails to fulfill the requirements predicted by Daniel's prophecy because according to Gabriel, the decree must result in the rebuilding of the overall structure of the city (cf. Dan. 9:25).

The obvious problem with Cyrus' decree in 537 is that it communicates no concern for the city whatsoever – rather, it is exclusively focused on rebuilding the temple. Therefore, this date is disqualified from being relevant to Daniel's 69

weeks. Another problem with this decree is that adding 69 weeks of years – whether they be Gregorian years or biblical years – to 537 BC fails to arrive at any date that is biblically significant. Calculating with Gregorian years arrives at 54 BC while utilizing biblical years comes to 61 BC. Because of the inherent problems with this position, along with it being an unpopular selection, the information examined thus far is sufficient to eliminate it as a possible starting point for Daniel’s prophecy.

#### 457 BC (Ezra 7:11-26)

Artaxerxes I was appointed king of Persia in 465 BC after his father, Xerxes I, was assassinated.<sup>7</sup> Approximately eight years into his reign, he issued a decree that allowed the Israelites to collect and utilize resources for the reinstatement of temple services. The essence of this decree is recorded in Ezra 7:11-19, which states the following:

Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest... I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee... And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem, And all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem: That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem.

This decree is a strong competitor for some scholars because if utilizing Gregorian years, the mathematics appear to succeed – it is important to note that there is no year 0 between 1 BC and AD 1. NT scholar Peter Gentry states that “sixty-nine sabbaticals or weeks of years bring the time to 27 A.D. when the ‘word to restore Jerusalem’ is understood to refer to the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 B.C... Half way through this time, i.e., 31 A.D., the Messiah is cut off, but not for himself.” Adherents of this view typically hold to certain assumptions concerning the text of Daniel 9, those being (1) the seventy weeks of years constitute Gregorian years instead of 360-day years, (2) there is no gap between the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> week, (3) the Messiah and “the prince that shall come” (v. 26)

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<sup>7</sup> Lester L. Grabbe, “Nehemiah,” in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 321.



are titles for the same character, (4) the divine anointing of Christ in Luke 3:22 fulfills the terminus of Daniel's first 69 weeks, and (5) the crucifixion of Jesus fulfills Daniel's prediction that "in the midst of the [70<sup>th</sup>] week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate."

Before examining the five primary assumptions present with this position, it must be noted that choosing this decree for the starting point of Daniel's 70 weeks suffers from two insurmountable problems, the first being that it makes no mention of construction. In fact, this decree appears to be the *least compatible* with Daniel's prophecy thus far because while Cyrus' command in 537 BC at least enabled the rebuilding of the temple, Artaxerxes' commandment focuses solely on the reinstatement of temple services by means of precious metals and animal offerings. The fact that this decree makes no mention of building the physical structure of Jerusalem whatsoever results in a grave incompatibility with the purpose of the decree predicted by Daniel "to restore and to build Jerusalem... the street shall be built again, and the wall" (Dan. 9:25). As noted by Nelson, "there was no decree in 458 [or 457] B.C. to rebuild Jerusalem."<sup>8</sup>

The second fatal flaw with this interpretation is that according to textual and historical data, Jesus' baptism could not have been in AD 27. Luke explicitly states that Jesus' baptism occurred "in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar" (Luke 3:1). Concerning the reign of Tiberius, historian J. Bert Lott notes that "when Augustus died in 14 CE he was... succeeded by his stepson, Tiberius."<sup>9</sup> Because Tiberius' accession to emperor did not happen until specifically September of AD 14, Jesus' baptism could not have occurred before the fall of AD 28.<sup>10</sup> Though proponents of the 457 BC date have attempted to fix this problem by claiming that Tiberius entered into a coregency with Augustus in AD 12 and therefore his fifteenth year of reign would have been in AD 27, this proposition has scant support and is unorthodox in its methodology.

Though the decree itself is in conflict with the details provided by Daniel, the assumptions usually present in taking this position also contain errors. The assumption that the 70 weeks utilize Gregorian years is critical to the position's success because if 360-day years are used then the calculation ends in AD 20, which is biblically insignificant. Because Daniel and Revelation are both apocalyptic works which utilize similar language and discuss identical events, a

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<sup>8</sup> Nelson, 244.

<sup>9</sup> J. Bert Lott, *Death and Dynasty in Early Imperial Rome: Key Sources, with Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Pettinger, *The Republic in Danger: Drusus Libo and the Succession of Tiberius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 237.

valid reason must be given to explain why Revelation would incorporate a 360-day year but Daniel would not. The assumption that there is no gap between the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> week also faces problems because Jesus stated that “the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet” (Matt. 24:15) would occur shortly before His second coming. Even the preterist view of eschatology would put the abomination of desolations as occurring circa AD 70 with the destruction of the Jewish temple by the Romans, which is four decades *after* proponents of the 457 BC decree believe the 70<sup>th</sup> week took place. Furthermore, the text implies that the cutting off of the Messiah will occur *directly* “after threescore and two weeks” (v. 26), not in the middle of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. Hence, equating the crucifixion of Christ to Daniel’s prediction that “the prince that shall come... shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate” (v. 27) is unfounded because the chronology of Daniel’s prophecy displays these events as occurring after the Messiah is cut off.

Viewing “Messiah the Prince” (v. 25) and “the prince that shall come” (v. 26) as the same figure creates significant issues. The latter character is associated with actions which would be considered sinister to the Jewish mind, such as destroying Jerusalem and the temple, causing the cessation of sacrifices, and giving rise to the abomination of desolations – Daniel casts such events in a negative light, as does Jesus in the Olivet Discourse. However, the cutting off of Messiah is portrayed as a sacrificial and noble act which is done “not for himself” (v. 25). It should be noted that even though modern Bible translations replace the KJV’s phrase “not for himself” with “have nothing,” Gentry defends the former option by arguing that “the phrase לֹא־לְנַפְשׁוֹ, commonly rendered ‘and he will have nothing’ is better translated ‘but not for himself.’ The quasi-verbal לֹא־ in Late Biblical Hebrew can function precisely as the Standard Biblical Hebrew negative אֵין. The point in the vision is that the coming king dies vicariously for his people.”<sup>11</sup> Hence, attempting to relate the events promoted by “the prince that shall come” (v. 26) with Jesus results in the use of special pleading, as can be demonstrated by Gentry’s proposal that the true culprits who destroyed the temple in AD 70 were the Jews.

The coming ruler must be the Messiah of v. 25 according to the context and normal rules of literature. Therefore “the people of the coming ruler” are the Jewish people. The statement is telling us that it is the Jewish people who will ruin / spoil the restored city and temple at the arrival of their coming King... Although the Roman army actually put the torch to Jerusalem, the destruction of the city was blamed squarely on the Jewish people themselves.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Peter J. Gentry, “Daniel’s Seventy Weeks and the New Exodus,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14, no. 1 (2010): 37.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

Regardless of the degree to which the Jewish people angered the Romans in the first century, it is inappropriate to label them as the ones who destroyed the temple when it was the Roman army who directly caused the destruction. Gentry's argument fails to provide the logical adequacy required to equate first century Jews to "the people of the prince that shall come" (Dan. 9:26) and is therefore too arbitrary to be respected.

Lastly, it must be noted that Jesus' baptism in Luke 3 is not the best choice when considering His arrival as Israel's Messiah. In fact, Jesus deliberately chose to hide his identity for multiple years after this event occurred (cf. Matt. 16:20; Mark 8:29-30). Therefore, even if Jesus' baptism did occur in AD 27, this date is still insufficient to qualify as the date which fulfilled the end of Daniel's first 69 weeks. A much more appropriate event would be Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, as this fulfilled an explicit prophecy made by Zechariah centuries before His birth. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zech. 9:9). The Jewish people actually affirmed Jesus as the Messiah by singing Psalm 118 (cf. Luke 19:37-40) during this instance, which was so significant that it infuriated the Pharisees! "The elements of the triumphal procession... unite to present Jesus as Israel's Messiah. In the minds of Pharisees, this not only transgresses Torah propriety, but borders on blasphemy. 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples' (v. 39), they demand, thus rebuking Jesus."<sup>13</sup>

444 BC (Neh. 2:1-9)

The third possible option for the *terminus a quo* for Daniel's prophecy is the decree given by Artaxerxes I to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, which is recorded in Nehemiah 2:1-8:

And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king... And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build

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<sup>13</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 447.

it... Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

The text is transparent that the decree granted to Nehemiah by Artaxerxes I had the sole purpose of rebuilding the physical structure of the city of Jerusalem. This decree is impressively congruent with Daniel's prediction, as it notes that the building project will specifically pertain to "the wall of the city" (Neh. 2:8; cf. Dan. 9:25). Nehemiah even goes into great detail of the wall's construction and how enemy nations tried to hinder the builders' success (cf. Neh. 4:6-17). Nevertheless, "the wall was finished in in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days" (Neh. 6:15). The Hebrew word translated as "wall" in Daniel 9:25 in the KJV, which is "חרוץ", is more difficult to define. It is a passive participle of חרץ meaning 'to cut, to sharpen, to decide.'<sup>14</sup> Regardless if one adheres to the popular scholarly position that חרוץ should actually be translated as "moat," this decree is still the only option which corresponds with Daniel's prediction. As explained earlier, the other two decrees focus solely on the temple, hence the city of Jerusalem "was certainly *not* refortified, as the prophecy requires ('with plaza and moat'). The first official decree for refortifying Jerusalem and building its walls was issued by Artaxerxes I... (Neh. 2:4-8)."<sup>15</sup> Though proponents of the 457 BC date may claim that Artaxerxes' decree in 444 BC is an extension of his former announcement, this argument is simply unfounded. In fact, it is irrational to believe said claim because Nehemiah had to personally ask Artaxerxes for permission to rebuild the city 13 years after his former decree.

Two noteworthy arguments commonly used in opposition to the 444 BC date concern (1) the use of 360-day years and (2) the insertion of a gap between the 69<sup>th</sup> and the 70<sup>th</sup> week. As has already been detailed throughout this article, proponents of the first objection must provide a reason as to why Genesis and (especially) Revelation would seem to incorporate 360-day years but Daniel would not. Until a valid argument is presented, the most hermeneutically consistent position is to infer that the prophetic years in Daniel are congruent with

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<sup>14</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 122.

<sup>15</sup> John C. Whitcomb, *Daniel*, Everyday Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1985), 94.

those in Revelation. Furthermore, adding 483 prophetic years to the one decree that actually references the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls and overall structure results in a miraculous conclusion – as will be discussed later in this article. The mathematical and textual support for using 360-day years is simply too overwhelming to ignore.

Concerning the presence of a gap between the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> weeks, it should be noted that there are other instances of prophecy which contain gaps that would be unable to discern if it were not for Yahweh's progressive revelation. For example, Luke records that near the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, He went into a synagogue and read Isaiah 61:1-2 (cf. Luke 4:16-20). The passage in Isaiah discusses a character whom "the Spirit of the Lord God is upon" (Isa. 61:1) and Jesus identifies Himself as said character. However, Jesus did something remarkable while reading from Isaiah – He stopped mid-sentence of verse 2 and then "he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down" (Luke 4:20). Instead of stating that it was His job "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God" (Isa 61:2), Jesus stated that His purpose was only "to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:19). Though a plain reading of Isaiah 61 does not imply a gap of time in the middle of verse 2, Jesus' foreknowledge allowed Him to make such a distinction. Hence, Jesus deliberately cut the verse in half because while His first coming was concerned with God's love and forgiveness (cf. John 3:16-17, 12:47), His second coming will execute God's judgement and wrath (cf. Matt. 24:30; 2 Thess. 1:7-9). New Testament scholar David Garland acknowledges that "the reference to the day of vengeance in Isa 61:2b is absent... Jesus heralds that now is the time when God's long-awaited promises are being fulfilled."<sup>16</sup> There are also other examples of these types of prophecies (cf. Isa. 9:6; Zech. 9:9-10), demonstrating that it is not unfounded to interpret a gap of time between the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> week if the evidence supports such a view.

### **Interpretation of Daniel's 70 Weeks**

Artaxerxes' decree in Nisan of 444 BC is the only option that truly fits the description of Daniel's prophecy. Though Nehemiah did not state the exact day in the month of Nisan when the decree was issued, his description at least provides a narrow range of dates which can be established. Aramaic papyri which were excavated from the city of Assuan appear to indicate that in 446 BC, the Jewish months Tishri and Kislev began on September 19 and November 15,

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<sup>16</sup> David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 2011), 197.

respectively.<sup>17</sup> In 1942, historians Richard Parker and Waldo Dubberstein attempted to reconstruct the Jewish calendar of the fifth century BC by extrapolating data from the materials they had available to them at the time. However, they mistakenly assigned Tishri and Kislev of 446 BC as occurring one month later than what the ancient papyri from Assuan indicate.<sup>18</sup> If the calendar constructed by Parker and Dubberstein is adjusted to correlate with the Aramaic papyri by being shifted backward one month, Nisan of 444 BC would begin on March 4. This is consistent with astronomical calculations which show that a new moon would have been visible after 10 PM on March 4, so a Jewish month would have begun on or shortly after this date.<sup>19</sup> Hence, both lunar and historical data support a start date for Nisan of 444 BC to be approximately March 4.

To add Daniel's 69 weeks of years to Nisan of 444 BC, these *biblical* years must first be converted into *Julian* years. This can be done by simplifying the 483 biblical years into 173,880 days (483 multiplied by 360) and then converting these days into Julian years, which results in 476 Julian years and 21 days (173,880 divided by 365.25). Because Artaxerxes' decree was issued in the spring of 444 BC, adding 476 years and 21 days to this event concludes in the year AD 33. Understanding the meaning of this calculation is one of the most phenomenal discoveries the human mind can find, for when considering the two popular choices among scholars for the date of Christ's crucifixion – AD 30 and AD 33 – the historical and textual evidence demand that “the crucifixion could not have happened in AD 30, leaving April... AD 33 as the only possible year for the crucifixion.”<sup>20</sup> More than half of a millennium before Christ was born, Daniel predicted the exact year in which He would present Himself as Israel's Messiah (cf. Dan. 9:25; Zech. 9:9; Luke 19:29-40) and then “be cut off, but not for himself” (Dan. 9:26; cf. Luke 23:33).

To add further credibility to Daniel's prophecy, if the exact month of Artaxerxes' decree is considered then the calculation is accurate with an even further degree of precision. Since Nisan consists of 30 days, Artaxerxes' decree was issued sometime between approximately March 4 and April 1 of 444 BC. When Daniel's 69 weeks of years are added to this range of dates, the conclusion

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<sup>17</sup> J. K. Fotheringham, “Calendar Dates in the Aramaic Papyri from Assuan,” *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society* 69, (1908): 15.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Parker and Waldo Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C. – A. D. 45*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 30.

<sup>19</sup> Herman Goldstine, *New and Full Moons 1001 B.C. to A.D. 1651* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1994), 47.

<sup>20</sup> Colin J. Humphreys, *The Mystery of the Last Supper: Reconstructing the Final Days of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 71.

is March 23 to April 22 of AD 33, which encompasses the commonly accepted date for Jesus' Passion Week! The caliber of this prediction is so miraculous that it can appropriately be labeled as the *ne plus ultra* of prophecy. In fact, the words Jesus spoke directly after the Pharisees rejected His proclamation as Messiah on Palm Sunday imply that He expected the Israelites to recognize the timing of His arrival. Luke 19:42-44 notes that Jesus said the following:

If thou [Israel] hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

According to Jesus, Israel's failure to recognize Him as Messiah is what generated their subsequent destruction. If the Israelites would have understood Daniel's 70-week prophecy – along with the messianic typology present in the Passover festival (cf. Ex. 12:1-6; 1 Cor. 5:7; Col. 2:17) – then they would have known exactly when the Messiah was to pay them their "visitation" (Luke 19:44) which God had promised centuries earlier.

Biblical support that Jesus was crucified in AD 33 comes from Luke's statement that His ministry began "in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea" (Luke 3:1). As noted earlier, since Tiberius began his rule in September of AD 14, his fifteenth year of reign would have spanned from September of 28 to September of 29. Likewise, Pontius Pilate's governorship ended in early AD 37, so Jesus had to have been crucified sometime between AD 29 and 36.<sup>21</sup> Because the Gospel of John records three explicit Passover feasts that occurred during Jesus' ministry (cf. John 2:13, 6:4, 12:1), the range of possible crucifixion dates is narrowed even further to AD 31 to 36 – note that there may have been one or more Passover feasts which John did not record. Out of this possible range of dates, AD 33 is commonly accepted due to what day of the week Nisan 14 would have fallen on according to lunar data. Physicists Humphreys and Waddington, who incorporated astronomical calculations to determine the date of Christ's crucifixion, concluded that "the evidence points to... April AD 33 as the date when Jesus Christ died."<sup>22</sup> Just as

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<sup>21</sup> Helen K. Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 8.

<sup>22</sup> Colin J. Humphreys and W. G. Waddington, "Dating the Crucifixion," *Nature* 306, (December 1983): 743.

Daniel predicted, the Messiah presented Himself to Israel exactly 69 weeks of years after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem was issued and He was executed almost immediately after.

#### Anderson's Calculations

Anderson's greatest contribution to an accurate understanding of Daniel's prophecy was his promotion of biblical years instead of Gregorian years. Since Daniel lived millennia before the use of the Gregorian calendar and centuries before the Julian calendar, it is indeed questionable to apply such a modern standard onto an ancient text. Incorporating biblical years of 360-days instead of Gregorian years results in the definition of '69 weeks of years' being shorter by 2,536.9 days, or approximately seven Gregorian years! As noted earlier, because Genesis and Revelation appear to both incorporate 360-day years, those who utilize Gregorian years for this prophecy must provide a hermeneutically valid reason for their decision. An intriguing fact concerning this subject is that even the prominent scientist Isaac Newton recognized Daniel's "reckoning [of] a time for a Calendar year of 360 days."<sup>23</sup> Though Anderson was correct in his use of biblical years, he assigned an incorrect date for Artaxerxes' decree to rebuild Jerusalem.

Because Nehemiah notes that the decree was issued "in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king" (Neh. 2:1) and Artaxerxes officially began his reign in 465 BC, Anderson naturally calculated Artaxerxes' twentieth year of reign as 445 BC. However, this conclusion fails to incorporate the standard practice during the time of Nehemiah which distinguished between a king's year of accession and his official first year of reign. Historians Horn and Wood note the following:

During the fifth century B.C... the Persians used the accession-year system, calling the interval between the accession of a king and the next New Year's Day "accession year," the Egyptians called the interval between the king's accession and the next Egyptian New Year's Day "year 1." Therefore the Egyptians began any regnal year of a Persian king several months earlier than the Persians themselves did.<sup>24</sup>

Hence, the time between a king's accession and the end of that same year was considered his 'accession year' because it could not be classified as a full year of

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<sup>23</sup> Isaac Newton, *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John* (Dublin: S. Powell, 1733), 113.

<sup>24</sup> S. H. Horn and L. H. Wood, "The Fifth-Century Jewish Calendar at Elephantine," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 13, no. 1 (January 1954): 4.



reign. Therefore, the first full *calendar year* would be considered the king's 'first year of reign.' Though not exactly the same, a modern example of this sort of dating would be to label January 20, 2016 to December 31, 2016 as president Trump's 'accession year' and to label January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2017 as his official 'first year of reign.'

An ancient document known as the Ptolemaic Canon, which records the reigns of various kings, indicates that Artaxerxes began his rule directly after his father's death on December 16, 465 BC.<sup>25</sup> Although the orthodox Hebrew year begins in the Jewish month Nisan (March/April), extrabiblical records indicate that the Jews of Nehemiah's time and location began their year in the month of Tishri (September/October).<sup>26</sup> This can also be seen by the biblical text itself, as Nehemiah 1:1 took place in "the month Chisleu [Kislev], in the twentieth year [of Artaxerxes' reign]" (Neh. 1:1). However, the second chapter of Nehemiah begins by noting that it was "the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king" (Neh. 2:1). Since the context demands that Nehemiah 2:1 occurred after Nehemiah 1:1, the only valid explanation for why the month of Kislev would have occurred earlier than Nisan in the same year is if Nehemiah was using a Hebrew calendar which began in Tishri. Since Artaxerxes began his reign several months after the Jewish year had already started in 465 BC, Nehemiah would have classified his first year of reign as occurring in Tishri of 465 BC to Tishri of 464 BC. Hence, Nisan of the twentieth year of Artaxerxes' reign would have been in March of 444 BC.

Since Anderson started a year too soon with his calculations, his conclusion was in error by one year. This resulted in him asserting that "the Passover of the crucifixion therefore was in A.D. 32, when Christ was betrayed on the night of the Paschal Supper, and put to death on the day of the Paschal Feast."<sup>27</sup> As noted by Hoehner, "the A.D. 32 date for the crucifixion is untenable. It would mean that Christ was crucified on either a Sunday or Monday."<sup>28</sup> Hence, Anderson's miscalculation of the timing of Artaxerxes' decree proved to be fatal for his position. Anderson also made the mistake of adding the incorrect number of days between Artaxerxes' decree and the arrival of Christ, but this will be

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Sprengling, "Chronological Notes from the Aramaic Papyri. The Jewish Calendar. Dates of the Achaemenians (Cyrus-Darius II)," in *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, ed. Robert F. Harper (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1911), 27:265.

<sup>26</sup> Horn and Wood, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Anderson, *The Coming Prince: The Marvelous Prophecy of Daniel's Seventy Weeks Concerning the Antichrist* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 122.

<sup>28</sup> Hoehner, 139.

discussed further in the analysis of Hoehner's interpretation because he too made this mistake.

### Hoehner's Calculations

Hoehner's research played an essential role in discovering a textually and historically sound interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27. While Anderson did well to popularize the use of biblical years instead of Gregorian years, the primary contribution made by Hoehner was the recognition of Artaxerxes' twentieth year of reign as being 444 BC instead of 445 BC. As noted during the discussion of Anderson's position, both textual data from Nehemiah and ancient documents support the position that the Jews living under Artaxerxes' rule utilized the accession year system when dating kings and that their year would have begun sometime in the Julian month September. When these factors are taken into account, along with the fact that Artaxerxes rose to power in December of 465 BC, the evidence supports the position that "the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king" (Neh. 2:1) would correlate to March of 444 BC. Hoehner's recognition of this discrepancy provided a textually and historically coherent interpretation of Daniel's 70-week prophecy by enabling Artaxerxes' 444 BC decree to act as a successful *terminus a quo* and conclude in the spring of AD 33, which is a valid date for Christ's presentation as Messiah and crucifixion.

Though Hoehner was correct in his revision of Anderson's position, he made two errors in his calculation. Hoehner's most significant error was that he added the wrong number of days to Artaxerxes' decree. As noted earlier, 483 biblical years equates to a total of 173,880 days. When examining Hoehner's calculation, however, it is apparent that he mistakenly added 173,883 days to Artaxerxes' decree. The reason for Hoehner's mathematical error is related to his perplexing equation used to add Daniel's 69 weeks of years to Artaxerxes' decree, as demonstrated by the following statement:

Multiplying the sixty-nine weeks by seven years for each week by 360 days gives a total of 173,880 days. The difference between 444 B.C. and A.D. 33, then, is 476 solar years. By multiplying 476 by 365.24219879 or by 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, 45.975 seconds, one comes to 173,855.28662404 days or 173,855 days, 6 hours, 52 minutes, 44 seconds. This leaves only 25 days to be accounted for between 444 B.C. and A.D. 33. By adding the 25 days to March 5 (of 444 B.C.), one comes to March 30 (of A.D.

33) which was Nisan 10 in A.D. 33. This is the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.<sup>29</sup>

Hoehner's equation fails because instead of converting the 173,880 days into Julian years of 365.25 days, he converted them into solar years of 365.242198 days and then added these years to the Julian calendar. This ultimately resulted in him adding a total of 173,883 days to his starting point instead of the correct number of days, which is 173,880. The miniscule difference of 0.0075 of a day between a Gregorian year and Julian year results in one extra leap year every century on the Julian calendar, which accounts for Hoehner's error of three extra days. If Hoehner correctly added 483 prophetic years to his starting date then he would have ended on March 26, AD 33 – several days *before* Jesus officially presented Himself as Israel's Messiah.

As to why Yahweh would permit Daniel's prediction to be accurate to the exact month instead of to the very day is likely due to the fact that it includes several events. Even though the Messiah is to arrive 69 weeks of years after the decree to restore Jerusalem is issued, it is also predicted that He would be cut off directly after this. Because Jesus' declaration as Messiah and His crucifixion happened on separate days within the same week, Nehemiah's reference to the month Nisan without providing the exact day of the month allows for both of these events to happen immediately after the 69 weeks of years have expired. Furthermore, Moses already foreshadowed the exact days of Nisan in which Jesus would present Himself as Israel's Messiah (Nisan 10) and be crucified without a single bone broken (Nisan 14) almost a millennium before Daniel wrote down his prophecy (cf. Exo. 12:3-6, 46; John 19:36). Hence, the true interpretation of Daniel's 69 weeks is perhaps even more astounding than Hoehner's proposal because it accounts for the slight time between Christ's arrival and His execution.

### **Application**

Properly understanding Daniel's 70-week prophecy helps Christians fulfill Scripture's command to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). Since only God exists outside of the temporal restraints of the universe, He alone has the ability to predict the future. There is no better example of Yahweh's predictive power than Daniel 9:24-27. Even God Himself declares that His ability to predict events before they occur is His signature in Isaiah 46:9-11:

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 140.

from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.

Though the multitude of prophecies which predicted characteristics such as Jesus' place of birth (cf. Mic. 5:2), childhood travels (cf. Hos. 11:1), betrayal (cf. Zech. 11:12), details of death (cf. Ps. 22:16-18), and many more serve as undeniable evidence for Yahweh's existence and His divine inspiration of the Bible, Daniel's 70-week prophecy is perhaps more impressive than all of the other messianic prophecies combined. Though typical criticisms of Jesus' prophetic fulfillment include the unfounded claims that Jesus manipulated events in His life to fit OT prophecies or that the NT authors invented details of the life of Christ to fulfill OT predictions, such arguments are completely unwarranted against Daniel's prophecy. Even if one promoted the fringe view that Jesus never existed, the position that the NT authors would have described the Messiah's death exactly when Daniel predicted it by chance alone is absurd. Furthermore, the fact that there have been multiple self-proclaimed Messiahs throughout history but Jesus was the only one who died in AD 33, split human history in half, and gained billions of followers over thousands of years is remarkable.

Another practical reason to understand Daniel 9:24-27 is that it inevitably leads to an appropriate respect for the OT. Too many churchgoers are ignorant of the details and purpose of the OT, which is more than twice as long as the NT! The earliest followers of Christ recognized that a basic understanding of the OT is necessary for one to have a rational faith in Jesus. Paul, when citing an ancient Christian creed, explained that "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). Seeing as Paul wrote 1 Corinthians "during his two- or three-year ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:10; 1 Cor. 16:8, 19), in about AD 55,"<sup>30</sup> the scriptures he was referring to were the books of the OT! A concrete example where knowledge of the OT played an essential role in a Christian's life and actually led to the salvation of one's soul can be found in Acts 8:27-35:

A man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority... Was returning [from Jerusalem], and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot... And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In

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<sup>30</sup> Walter Elwell and Robert Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 273.

his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

The Ethiopian eunuch was reading from Isaiah 53, a passage written centuries before the birth of Jesus which describes a suffering servant of Yahweh in which “it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin... he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isa. 53:10-12). Phillip’s knowledge of OT prophecy enabled him to evangelize to a curious unbeliever and resulted in the eunuch professing that “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37). Therefore, in order for Christians to best fulfill the great commission and build God’s kingdom (cf. Matt. 6:33, 28:19-20), understanding OT themes and prophecies is invaluable.

### **Conclusion**

Though different interpretations of Daniel 9:24-27 have abounded throughout the centuries, the correct position must be validated by the textual and historical data. This article demonstrated that (1) the decree issued by Artaxerxes in 444 BC is the only option which fulfills the specifics of the decree predicted by Daniel, (2) incorporating biblical years of 360 days instead of Gregorian years affirms a consistent hermeneutic concerning prophecy, and (3) the event which best fulfills the details of the terminus of Daniel’s 69 weeks is Christ’s Passion Week in AD 33. Properly understanding Daniel’s 70-week prophecy serves to better equip the Christian’s apologetic arsenal while simultaneously demanding appreciation for biblical inspiration, authority, and inerrancy. As the author of Hebrews penned some 2,000 years ago, “the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

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