

## Daniel's 70 Shemitahs Part 2

Although the title of the following paper prepared by William H. Shea references the period quoted in Daniel 8:14, this research by Mr. Shea proves 457 B.C. to be the correct date for starting Daniel's 70 Shemitahs prophecy.

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### **Supplementary Evidence in Support of 457 B.C. as the Starting Date for the 2300 Day-Years of Daniel 8:14**

by

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Seventh-day Adventists have long held that the 2300 prophetic and symbolic evening-mornings or historical years extend from 457 B.C. to A.D. 1844.<sup>1</sup> This has been done on the basis of the apocalyptic rule of a symbolic and prophetic day equalling a historical year (Eze 4:6; Num. 14:34).<sup>2</sup> The starting point has been established by “cutting off” the 70 weeks or 490 years of Dan 9:24–27 from the first portion of the 2300 days.<sup>3</sup>

The time period of Dan 9 begins with the going forth of the “word” to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (v. 25). Four different decrees have been reviewed to establish this starting point: Cyrus’ decree in Ezra 1, Darius’ decree in Ezra 6, the decree of Artaxerxes I in Ezra 7, and the letter of the same king to Nehemiah in Neh. 2. The first two decrees deal with the rebuilding of the temple, and the last two have to do with the reconstruction of the city. It is, therefore, from the first of the last two decrees that the date for the prophecy of Dan 9:25 should be dated. This decree is dated to the 7th year of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:7), according to the Jewish fall-to-fall reckoning employed by Nehemiah (Neh. 1:1; 2:1), Ezra’s contemporary and fellow worker (Neh. 8:1, 9). This extended from Tishri or September–October in 458 B.C. Since the events described for this year fell in the winter, spring, and summer of 457 B.C., Seventh-day Adventists have used that year as the basis for their calculations. These are correct but, according to the additional details examined below, more evidence can be adduced in support of their accuracy.

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### **The Death of Xerxes, the Accession of Artaxerxes, and the Latter King’s 7th Year**

According to a late and still unpublished astronomical text, Xerxes was murdered in August of a year in which two eclipses of the moon occurred. This unusual circumstance dates that year firmly to 465 B.C. The succession of Artaxerxes was delayed because of palace intrigue, especially by a leading official who wanted to make himself king.<sup>4</sup> This delayed his accession until after 1 Tishri of that year. This means the balance of that year and 464 until the fall New Year of 1 Tishri constituted his accession year, according to the Jewish fall-to-fall calendar. Thus, his first year began in the fall of 464 B.C. That dates his seventh year from the fall of 458 B.C. to the fall of 457 B.C.

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<sup>1</sup> G. F. Hasel, “Divine Judgment,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. R. Dederen, et. al (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 838–839.

<sup>2</sup> See “Year-Day Principle” in my *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series, Vol. 1 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 67–110.

<sup>3</sup> See my *Daniel 7–12* (Boise: Pacific Press, 1996) 107–109.

<sup>4</sup> Julia Neuffer, “The Accession of Artaxerxes I,” *AUSS* 6:1 (1968): 60–87.

## **The Date of Ezra's Arrival in Jerusalem**

The decree that was given by Artaxerxes to Ezra is recorded in Ezra 7:11–26. The month in which it was given is not recorded, but it was given in time for Ezra and those with him to depart on the first day of the first month of Nisan (Ezra 7:7–8). They left central Babylonia at that time, and on the 9th day of that same month they encamped at the Aha'va River (Ezra 8:15, 21, 31). After camping there for three days, during which a fast was proclaimed, they pressed on to the province of Judah. They arrived there on the first day of the fifth month (Ezra 7:8). They spent three days in Jerusalem and then unloaded the vessels for the temple (Ezra 8:31–34).

The decree which led to this return undoubtedly was given during the winter, probably January or February, in order for them to be ready for a departure in March–April or Nisan, the first month. This locates these three events on the following time scale: The decree of Ezra 7:11–26 in the winter of 458/457 B.C., the departure in the spring of 457 B.C., and the arrival in the summer of 457 B.C. This was then followed by the fall New Year of 1 Tishri in September–October of 457 B.C. This completed the Jewish fall-to-fall calendar year from 1 Tishri in September of 458 B.C. to 1 Tishri in September of 457 B.C. This was the 7th year of Artaxerxes according to Jewish reckoning.

## **Ezra's First Action: Dealing With Foreign Wives**

According to Ezra 9:1, “after these things”—i.e., after the arrival and deposit of the vessels in the temple—some unidentified officials came to Ezra and reported that “the people of Israel and the priests and Levites had not separated themselves from the peoples of the land.” Far from it—they had intermarried to an alarming extent. When Ezra heard this he went into lament, mourning (Ezra 8:3–5), and prayer (Ezra 8:6–15).

### *SHEA: SUPPLEMENTARY EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF 457 B.C.*

To deal with this problem Ezra called for a convocation in Jerusalem (Ezra.10:6–8). The men of Judah came to that assembly on the twentieth day of the month (Ezra.10:9), or December of 457 B.C. This was after the fall New Year of 1 Tishri that began the eighth year of Artaxerxes, according to Jewish fall-to-fall reckoning. In the cold rainy winter month of December the people complained about having to stand out in the rain (Ezra.10:13), and as a consequence a more detailed investigation was set in motion. The inquiry began its work ten days later, on the first day of the tenth month, and they finished their investigation two months after that, on the first day of the first month, in the spring of 456 B.C. The list of those who had married foreign wives and pledged to put them away is then given the last twenty-six verses of the book of Ezra (Ezra.10:18–44). From this a calendar can be set up for Ezra's first major action in Judah. He was apprised of the problem of foreign wives in the fall of 457 B.C., and the problem was resolved by the spring of 456 B.C. All of this occurred within the eighth year of Artaxerxes when viewed from the standard of the Jewish fall-to-fall calendar.

## **Ezra's Second Major Action: To Start Building the City of Jerusalem**

With the problem of foreign wives and the people's purification out of the way, Ezra could now turn his attention to a major project—the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. The temple had been rebuilt by 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:15: the 6th year of Darius I), but the city around and adjacent to it was still in ruins. This was the next project Ezra took on, and the evidence for it comes from the letter of the western governors in Ezra 4:11–16.

At first glance this letter appears to be out of order. It is partially out of order chronologically, but chapter four takes a topical side branch to deal with opposition to the Jews. The order of this chapter is:

- Opposition to the Jews in the time of Cyrus—vs. 1–5
- Opposition to the Jews in the time of Xerxes—v. 6
- Opposition to the Jews in the time of Artaxerxes—vs. 7–23

- A return to the rectification of the problem of opposition in the time of Cyrus—v. 24 (in the time of Darius)

Then the rest of the book goes on to tell of the successes of the Jews, first in the time of Zerubbabel in chapters five and six, when they built the temple. Then the rest of the book deals with the return under Ezra and its consequences in chapters 7–10, as described above.

Thus, Ezra has first given the negative side of the story in chapter 4 and then the positive side of the story in chapters 5–10.

There is also an internal chronology in chapter four that is successive and consistent. It deals with four Persian kings:

1. Cyrus (539–530 B.C.), vs. 1–4
2. Darius (522–486 B.C.), v. 5
3. Xerxes (486–465 B.C.), v. 6
4. Artaxerxes (465 B.C. ff.), vs. 7–24
5. Return to Darius I, v. 24 and chapters 5–6

Only Cambyses is missing from the list (530–522 B.C.), and he undoubtedly is absent because nothing good happened to the Jews during his reign. He was opposed to foreign gods, and thus no work was done on the temple in Jerusalem during his reign.

With this chronology and internal consistency in the book of Ezra established, the nature of the problem during the reign of Artaxerxes can be addressed more directly. The problem can be specifically located during the reign of Artaxerxes both because of the reference to him in Ezra 4:7 and because of the address on the heading of the letter of the western governors that was sent to him, “to Artaxerxes the king.” Thus, it does not really matter where in the book of Ezra this letter is located, for it clearly belongs to Artaxerxes, because it was addressed to him. “This is a copy of the letter that they sent,” is the way this letter is introduced.

The problem, in the view of the western governors, is stated succinctly: “Be it known to the king that the Jews who came up from you to us have gone to Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city; they are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations” (v. 12). Then they threatened the king with the loss of tax revenue if he permitted this city to be built, because it had a reputation for rebellion, and thus withholding tax payments.

The king agreed with the estimate of the western governors and instructed them to “make a decree that these men be made to cease, and that this city be not rebuilt until a decree is made by me” (v. 21). The king’s response is appropriate to the warning of the western governors. The city was being rebuilt, and he told them to stop it from being rebuilt.

The first question here is, Who was doing this rebuilding of Jerusalem? The people who led and stimulated this rebuilding “came up from you,” i.e., Artaxerxes. Thus, this was not the group that returned in the time of Cyrus because they did not come from Cyrus; they came up from Artaxerxes. He knew who they were. He permitted them to come back to Judah.

Nor does this fit with Nehemiah, for he was not stopped in his efforts to get the walls of Jerusalem up. Nehemiah’s opponents—Sanballat, Tobiah, and Gershem (Neh 6:1), were different from the opponents of the Jews who wrote to the king in this case—Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, Rehum, and Shimshai (Ezra 4:7–9).

Thus, there was an eventual rebuilding of the temple by those who returned under Cyrus. There was also an eventual rebuilding of Jerusalem under Artaxerxes, and an initially unsuccessful attempt at rebuilding Jerusalem earlier in the reign of Artaxerxes. This fits perfectly with Ezra and the group of people who returned with him (Ezra 8).

The question then is, when did Ezra undertake this attempt at rebuilding Jerusalem? He could not have undertaken it before he dealt with the issue of foreign wives, for the people were too divided over that issue. The logical time for him to have done so was after that issue had been cleared up in the early spring of 456 B.C. Thus, the most favourable time to undertake this construction project was in the spring, summer, and fall of 456 B.C.

### **The Requirements of Dan 9:25**

Daniel 9:25 dates the beginning of these two prophetic time periods to the “going forth of the ‘word’ to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.” Several different approaches have been taken toward the significance of this phrase. Historicocritical scholars date it to ca. 593, when Jeremiah received the prophetic “word” that Jerusalem would be restored after the 70-year period of exile. This is done in an effort to shorten the prophetic time period down to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes in 165 B.C., but neither the dates nor the events involved work out.

A second approach has been to look for a royal decree from a king to rebuild Jerusalem. For evangelical scholars, this has been taken as Artaxerxes’ letters to Nehemiah, as referred to in Neh. 2:1–9, the 20th year of Artaxerxes, or 444 B.C. Nehemiah does refer to the broken-down state of Jerusalem and ask permission to rebuild it. However, his specific request is only for letters to the western governors to permit him to pass on to Judah and to the keeper of the king’s forest for timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress. In contrast with Ezra 1, 6, and 7, where the royal decrees given to the Jews are quoted, the contents of the letters are not quoted here in this context.

Starting from 444 B.C. and adding 490 years to the time of the Messiah takes one more than a decade beyond the time of Jesus of Nazareth. This has required a shortening of the time period involved by using a lunar calendar calculation so complicated that it is unlikely that anyone in ancient (or modern) times could understand it.<sup>5</sup> Thus, this approach has not worked out well. This has led back to the royal decree of Artaxerxes that was given to Ezra. It is extensive, and it is quoted in the Aramaic in which it was written (Ezra 7:11–26). The problem here is not so much with the date as it is with the contents of the decree. The decree gives Ezra wide ranging authority, allowing him to inflict the death penalty (Ezra 7:26), to teach the Law of God, even to non-Judahites (v. 25), and to appoint legal magistrates in various places (v. 25). In addition, there were extensive offerings given to the temple by the Persian king. Of these offerings the king said, “whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do, according to the will of your God” (7:18). Thus, for Ezra to have used the balance of the silver and the gold for rebuilding Jerusalem would not be unexpected and, given the wide-ranging authority granted to him, it is not surprising that he found it within the realm of his authority to start this building project. The evidence from the letter of the western governors in Ezra 4:11–23 indicates that he did.

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<sup>5</sup> Futurist scholars begin with the assumption that the final seven-year period of the 490 dayyear prophecy is still to come after a Christian “parenthesis.” This leaves them with 483 years, rather than 490, to deal with. Knowing that a prophetic year consists of twelve months of thirty days, or 360 days, they multiply 483 by 360, yielding 173,880 days. They then turn this into actual years by dividing this by 365, yielding 476.38 years rather than 483. They claim this reveals, to the day, when Jesus entered Jerusalem hailed as a king. Among the problems is the fact that there is no biblical sanction for turning “prophetic” years into “actual” years. A year was a year. (Note that when they deal with the 1,260 days, 42 months, and “time, times, and half a time” of Revelation, this sleight of hand is not used.) Second, the “anointing” in question in Daniel is not the people hailing Christ as their king, but the descent of the Holy Spirit and the pronouncement of the Father at Jesus’ baptism, more than three years before. By cutting off seven years and placing the anointing three years later than it occurred, futurists work their way around the problem of having their calculation end a decade away from the date given by the more straight-forward reading of the text.

Thus, there are internal grounds for using the decree of Artaxerxes in Ezra 7 for the starting point of the 70 weeks of Dan 9:24–27. Nevertheless, it is still awkward that the decree does not specifically authorize the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. There may be an exegetical way to make the application more specific. It requires an examination of the word used for the order to rebuild in Dan 9:25.

### **The Hebrew Word for “Word” in Dan 9:25**

The word used here for the going forth of the “word” to restore and rebuild Jerusalem is the common Hebrew noun *dabar*. It is the common word for “word” that is used 1430 times in the Old Testament. Aside from the common meaning of the word, it can also mean an “affair, thing, something.” It is not the specific and technical term for a royal decree. It can commonly be the word from one person to another, and in a number of cases it can be the word of God to a person or persons. In the book of Daniel there are two words that are used for a royal decree. The decree of Nebuchadnezzar is referred to as a *gezerah* (Dan 4:17, 24). For the decree of Darius the Mede the word used is *‘esar* (seven times in Dan 6). Both of these words are in Aramaic passages however, and Dan 9:25 was written in Hebrew.

In the book of Ezra decrees of the kings are mentioned in a number of places, commonly with the Aramaic word *te’ern* (4:10, 21; 7:14, 21 = Artaxerxes; 5:13, 21 = Cyrus; 6:8, 11 = Darius). In the Hebrew portions of Ezra, the word *qôl* is used for Cyrus’ decree in 1:1, but the same word is used for Ezra’s proclamation for the gathering of the people to Jerusalem to deal with the issue of foreign wives (10:7). This is the common word for “voice,” which leads to the idea of the order, command, or decree as being the spoken word of a person, royal or common.

In the book of Esther, written in Hebrew, the word *dat* is used nine times for decrees of Ahasuerus or Xerxes (2:8; 3:15; 4:3, 8; 8:14, 17; 9:1, 13, 14). This is a loan word from Old Persian meaning “law.” It is also used three times in the Aramaic of Daniel for decrees of Nebuchadnezzar (2:9, 13, 15).

From this brief lexical search of Ezra, Daniel, and Esther, no specific evidence has been found suggesting that we ought to translate the *dabar* of Dan 9:25 as a “royal decree.” It could just as well be the word of a person other than the king. The question, then, is who gave the “word,” in order or command, to begin the reconstruction of Jerusalem? It can only be said to be Artaxerxes in an indirect and oblique sense. Who gave the order or command in a more direct and specific sense? The answer from the above examination of the letter of the western governors is obvious. The one who sent out the word to begin the reconstruction of Jerusalem was Ezra. It was not issued by a Persian king from Pasargadae or Persepolis, it was sent forth from Jerusalem by Ezra. Just as his “voice” or word went throughout the land to gather at Jerusalem to deal with the issue of foreign wives, so his word was sent forth after the episode to call the people back to Jerusalem for its reconstruction. Thus the “going forth of the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem” in Dan 9:25 was Ezra’s word, not the decree of Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes’ decree played a part in this process, however, for it led to the return of Ezra, who gave that more specific word. Artaxerxes’ decree created the conditions ripe for the fulfilment of the prophetic specification, but it was Ezra himself who carried it out most directly.

That raises the question of when Ezra sent forth this word to rebuild Jerusalem. In the chronology developed above, it was noted that this could only have taken place after the issue of foreign wives was dealt with. That process was completed by the first month of Nisan in 456 B.C. The going forth of Ezra’s word to rebuild should have taken place soon after that, in the late spring or early summer of 456 B.C. All of this still falls within the Jewish fall-to-fall calendar for the eighth year of Artaxerxes.

### **Chronological Effect of Calculating the 2300 Days of Dan 8:14**

As outlined earlier in this study, the decree that Artaxerxes gave to Ezra for his return was undoubtedly given earlier in 457 B.C., in January or February. Then Ezra began his return in March–April, and he arrived in Jerusalem in July–August. Previous interpretations have held that Ezra’s arrival fulfilled the conditions of the decree of Artaxerxes, thus the count of 2300 day-years starts in the fall of 457 B.C. as the beginning of the first fall-to-fall year of the 2300. That takes us to the year from the fall of A.D. 1843 to the fall of 1844 as the

last of the 2300 years. The historical points at the beginning are correct and the calculations are correct, starting from the fall New Year immediately after the arrival, fulfilling the conditions of the decree.

What is suggested here is that there is another way of arriving at this final end point. If one counts from the fall-to-fall year of 457–456 B.C., Artaxerxes' eighth year, one can count directly from the time when Ezra's word was sent out to rebuild Jerusalem. This is a way, therefore, of counting that same year as the first year of the 2300. The conclusion is the same, that from the fall of A.D. 1843 to the fall of 1844 was the 2300th year of Dan 8:14. One can reach that conclusion indirectly from Artaxerxes' decree or one can count it directly from the time when Ezra's word went forth for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Given the fact that Ezra's word fulfils the specification of Dan 9:25 more directly, that appears to be the preferable route to follow.

End of article.