

JEREMIAH'S SEVENTY YEARS FOR BABYLON: A RE-ASSESSMENT PART I: THE SCRIPTURAL DATA

ROSS E. WINKLE
Salem, Oregon 97305

References to "seventy years" as a prophetic period of time occur in several places in the OT: 2 Chr 36:21; Isa 23:15-18; Jer 25:11-12; 29:10; Dan 9:2; Zech 1:12; 7:5. Two of these occurrences, 2 Chr 36:21 and Dan 9:2, refer specifically to prophecies about the seventy years in Jer 25:11-12 and 29:10; and all four of these texts are generally considered to refer to the period of the Jewish exile in Babylon. This study investigates the meaning of these four closely-related texts (I will not deal in any detail with Isa 23:15-18, Zech 1:12, and Zech 7:5, since these three passages do not refer to Jeremiah's prophecies).

1. *Views as to the Meaning of the "Seventy Years"*

The reason for a reappraisal of the four above-mentioned closely related texts relating to the Babylonian captivity is the continued variety of interpretations given them by scholars.¹ These interpretations basically fall into three categories: (1) the seventy years represent literal, exact time; (2) the seventy years represent symbolic time; and (3) the seventy years, while neither exact nor symbolic, give an approximate chronological framework for historical events. Even within each of these categories, however, there is a variety of opinion as to what constitutes the correct interpretation.

Among those who consider the seventy years to be literal years, some interpreters believe that the seventy years extended from the

¹For major studies on the seventy-year prophecy, see C. F. Whitley, "The Term Seventy Years Captivity," *VT* 4 (1954):60-72; idem, "The Seventy Years Desolation—A Rejoinder," *VT* 7 (1957):416-418; Avigdor Orr, "The Seventy Years of Babylon," *VT* 6 (1956):304-306; Peter R. Ackroyd, "Two OT Historical Problems of the Early Persian Period," *JNES* 17 (1958):3-27; R. Borger, "An Additional Remark on P. R. Ackroyd, *JNES*, XVII, 23-27," *JNES* 18 (1959):74; and Gerhard Larsson, "When Did the Babylonian Captivity Begin?" *JTS*, n.s., 18 (1967):417-423.

initial attack of Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon against Jerusalem in 605 B.C. to the return of the Jews under Cyrus of Persia in 536 B.C. (here, the seventy years are reckoned inclusively).² Others have concluded that the seventy years extended from the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. to the completion of the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem in 516 B.C.³ And still others who recognize the seventy years as intended in a literal sense in the prophecies of Jeremiah, assert that these years were in actuality shortened by God's mercy, since when one works backwards from 539 B.C. (the occasion of the capture of Babylon), it is obvious that none of the traditional starting dates—605 B.C., 597 B.C., or 587/86 B.C.—provides a time period of exactly seventy years.⁴

Interpreters who take the seventy years to be symbolic, however, refuse to see any correspondence between these years and actual history. Usually working backwards from 539 B.C. as the *terminus ad quem*, such interpreters agree that neither 605 B.C. nor 612 (the destruction of Nineveh) as the *terminus a quo* yield a time frame of seventy literal years. Thus, since in their view the seventy years are not exact (and thus cannot be literal), this time reference must be symbolic. For some such interpreters the seventy years can be equated with the general term "many," referring to a long period of domination by the Babylonians;⁵ others suggest that these years represent a lifetime, since Ps 90:10 presents seventy years as a normal human lifespan;⁶ and still others view the expression simply as the use of a term (already employed in an Esarhaddon inscrip-

²E.g., see "Chronology of Exile and Restoration," *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., vol. 3 (Washington, D.C., 1976), pp. 85-110, esp. pp. 90-97; and Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1982), pp. 176, 198. For one who accepts these dates but takes the seventy years to be a round figure, see R. K. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL, 1973), pp. 85, 126.

³Whitley, "Captivity," pp. 60-72, esp. pp. 68 and 72.

⁴Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL, 1979), p. 32.

⁵J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI, 1980), pp. 513-514.

⁶E.g., see Loring W. Batten, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, ICC (Edinburgh, 1913), pp. 71, 223.

tion concerning Babylon) that referred to the period of desolation for a nation.⁷

The third general category of interpreters—those accepting neither the symbolic interpretation, nor the seventy years as being exact—believe that the prophetic seventy-year period is remarkably close to historical accuracy (612 to 539 = 73 years; 605 to 539 = 66 years).⁸

The variety of interpretations concerning the seventy years of Babylonian captivity has to a large degree been based on the interpretation of the term in 2 Chronicles and Daniel (as well as Zechariah). For example, some maintain that the authors of 2 Chronicles and Daniel reinterpreted the seventy-year prophecy from a completely different theological standpoint than Jeremiah originally did.⁹ Thus, to them the seventy-year term is a fluid one.

The purpose here is not to discuss the advantages and/or disadvantages of any of the specific views mentioned above. Rather, we endeavor herein to determine whether the relevant passages in Jeremiah, 2 Chronicles, and Daniel allow for a literal understanding of the seventy years in some manner overlooked by investigators in the literal school of interpretation. I first examine the relevant texts in these three books in order to see whether they allow for a literal understanding. This is the treatment given in the present article. Then in a follow-up article I will examine the relationship between the texts and history in order to ascertain whether history itself allows for a literal understanding of the seventy years.

⁷See the discussion in Borger, p. 74; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 143-146; and Robert P. Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant: Uses of Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (London, Eng., 1981), pp. 203-204.

⁸See, e.g., F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI, 1982), pp. 42-43. See also Thompson, pp. 513-514. For others who take the seventy years to be symbolic, see Edward Lewis Curtis and Albert Alonzo Madsen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles*, ICC (Edinburgh, 1910), p. 524; John Bright, *Jeremiah*, AB (Garden City, NY, 1965), pp. 160, 208; and Peter R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century B.C.* (Philadelphia, 1968), pp. 240-241.

⁹See Ackroyd, "Historical Problems," pp. 23-27; and Michael Fishbane, "Revelation and Tradition: Aspects of Inner-Biblical Exegesis," *JBL* 99 (1980): 356-359.

2. *The Texts Relating to the Seventy Years*

Jeremiah 29:10

Because of the complex textual tradition in Jer 25, I will begin my discussion here with Jer 29:10, before giving attention to Jer 25:11-12. As is commonplace in Jeremiah, the LXX differs from the MT in this chapter, but there are no major differences in vs. 10, the verse which contains the reference to the seventy years.¹⁰ The MT reads: "For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place."¹¹

The context of this verse indicates that it is part of a letter that Jeremiah wrote to the exiles after the capture and subsequent exile of King Jehoiachin (Jeconiah), the queen mother, members of the royal household, and various craftsmen by Nebuchadnezzar (29:1-2). The letter can thus be dated to 597 B.C. or shortly thereafter. While scholars have disputed the original contents of the letter,¹² it remains clear that sometime near 597 B.C. Jeremiah wrote a letter referring to a seventy-year period of time.

This particular verse furnishes three important pieces of information: (1) the seventy years are a period of time relating to *Babylon*; (2) these seventy years for Babylon are to be completed sometime in the future; and (3) the activity of God on behalf of the exiles will take place at the time of the completion of the seventy years for Babylon (or afterwards).¹³ It is helpful to stress, at the same time, what the text does *not* say: (1) the beginning and end of

¹⁰The LXX of 29:10 (36:10) reads: *hotan mellē plērousthai Babylōni hebdomēkonta etē. . . .* ("when I am about to fulfill seventy years for Babylon. . . ."). However, *mellō* plus an infinitive can take on a meaning denoting certainty or destiny. See William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed. (Chicago, 1979), p. 501. For similar constructions, see Matt 16:27; 17:22; Luke 9:44; and Rev 12:5.

¹¹All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the RSV.

¹²E.g., see the discussion in Ackroyd, "Historical Problems," p. 23.

¹³I do not agree with the view that Jeremiah did not predict a return from exile. For this view, see Johann Lust, "'Gathering and Return' in Jeremiah and Ezekiel," in P.-M. Bogaert, ed., *Le Livre de Jérémie: Le Prophète et son milieu Les Oracles et Leur Transmission*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 54 (Leuven, 1981):119-142. As for the seventy years referring to Babylon, see Orr, p. 305.

the seventy years are not specifically related to any historical situations; (2) the seventy years do not directly refer to Judah or the Judeans; and (3) the seventy years do not specifically describe the length of the exile.

Jeremiah 25:11-12

With these facts in mind, we can turn our attention to Jer 25:11-12. These verses are a part of a prophecy that can be dated to the fourth year of Jehoiachin's father Jehoiakim (25:1).

As mentioned above, the textual tradition here is extremely complicated. The LXX differs from the MT in several key areas, such as the following: (1) the LXX contains no direct references to Nebuchadnezzar or Babylon (cf. vss. 1, 9, 11, and 12 in the MT); (2) vss. 13b-14 are missing from the LXX; and (3) the LXX inserts chaps. 46-51 of the MT between 25:13a and 25:15 (and even in a different order).¹⁴ The implications for interpretation of the seventy years in vss. 11-12 are important.

On the one hand, according to the MT the text states:

This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, says the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste.

Thus, according to this tradition, the seventy years refer to the servitude of "these nations," which were the nations "round about" Judah (vs. 9). Here Judah is not specifically mentioned as serving Babylon for seventy years, although becoming "a ruin and a waste." Also, the MT states that God will punish the Babylonian people and its king at the conclusion of the seventy years. This is further clarified in vs. 14 (missing from the LXX), where the text states that the Babylonians will become slaves of many nations, even as they have made slaves of many nations. Thus, upon a comparison with 29:10, the MT—while referring to the seventy years in a different

¹⁴For an excellent discussion on the textual nature of Jeremiah, see Emanuel Tov, "Some Aspects of the Textual and Literary History of the Book of Jeremiah," in Bogaert, pp. 146-167.

context and containing different details—does not disagree with that text’s understanding of the seventy years.

In the LXX the picture is different, however, wherein vss. 11 and 12 read as follows (my translation):

And all the land shall be a desolation, and they will serve among the nations seventy years. And when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish that nation, says the Lord, and I will make them an everlasting desolation.

According to this tradition, “they” (the Judeans) will serve among the nations seventy years (instead of the nations serving Babylon for this time period). The expression “that nation” must refer to the unnamed “family from the north” (vs. 9: *tēn patrian apo borra*), which would refer to Babylon (even though the LXX does not mention Babylon by name in this passage). Thus, the only significant difference between the LXX of these verses and either the LXX or the MT of 29:10 is that the Judeans would serve “among the nations” for a period of seventy years. Otherwise, the two texts agree.

A Broader Context in Jeremiah

At this point it is important to notice whether there is any information within Jeremiah which points to a literal or a symbolic interpretation of the seventy years. The word *šānāh* (“year”) occurs forty-three times in Jeremiah, and thirty-two of these occurrences refer to dates which can be verified historically as referring to literal years.¹⁵ Eight of the remaining eleven occurrences could well refer to literal years also (although four of these perhaps refer to a general period of time).¹⁶ The remaining three occurrences are in the specific texts we are investigating as referring to the “seventy years” (25:11-12 [twice] and 29:10). None of the forty-three references is obviously symbolic in nature. Thus the evidence—on purely quantitative grounds—favors a literal interpretation.

But there is also another persuasive reason to take the seventy years as literal. In Jer 28:3, the prophet Hananiah prophesied that

¹⁵Cf. Jer 1:2, 3; 25:1, 3; 28:1, 16, and 17.

¹⁶The texts are Jer 11:23; 17:8; 23:12; 34:14 (2); 48:44; and 51:46 (2). Of these eight references, two (34:14) refer to actual (though non-specified) years, and four (11:23; 17:8; 23:12; and 48:44) favor a literal interpretation.

the vessels from the temple would be brought back to Jerusalem within two years. He then stated (vs. 11) that God would break the yoke of King Nebuchadnezzar over the nations within two years. But Jeremiah later told Hananiah that the latter would die "this very year" (vs. 16: *haššānāh ʿatāh*) because he advocated rebellion. So instead of Hananiah's prophecy being fulfilled in two *years*, he himself died in two *months* (cf. vss. 1 and 17).

Apparently at a not-much-earlier date, Jeremiah had attacked this same false prophecy (cf. 27:16-22; 28:1). But in doing so, Jeremiah prophesied that the vessels of the temple would not be brought back "shortly" (*ʿatāh m^ehērāh*) as the false prophets had declared (27:16); instead, they would remain in Babylon "until the day" (*ʿad yôm*) that God would give attention to them. Then God would "bring them back and restore them" (vs. 22).

In the episode in chap. 28 we find two prophets in conflict. Hananiah had predicted two years or less as the remainder of the exile (28:3, 11). But four years previously (cf. 28:1 and 29:1-2) Jeremiah had already predicted that the exiles would not return to Jerusalem until the seventy years for Babylon had been fulfilled (29:10). On the basis of this comparison, it seems logical that just as the shorter period of two years was meant to be literal, so too the longer period of seventy years was meant to be literal.¹⁷

2 Chronicles 36:20b-21

Chronicles contains a new element relating to the interpretation of the seventy-year prophecy of Jeremiah, and this element is the reference to the land enjoying its sabbaths while it lay desolate. There is here a direct reference to Lev 26:34-35 (see also vs. 43), which reads:

Then the land shall enjoy its sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its sabbaths. As long as it lies desolate it shall have rest, the rest which it had not in your sabbaths when you dwelt upon it.

¹⁷G. R. Driver, who states that Jeremiah foretold of a literal seventy-year desolation and ruin of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., illustrates what erroneous interpretations result when clear textual evidence is ignored (i.e., seventy years for *Babylon*). See "Sacred Numbers and Round Figures," in *Promise and Fulfillment*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Edinburgh, 1963), p. 62.

On the basis of this background from Leviticus, some expositors see the Chronicler as interpreting the seventy years to be seventy years of sabbaths, each sabbath standing for the sabbatical years (Lev 25:1-7) that had not been kept by the Israelites.¹⁸ Thus, during the Babylonian exile, the land enjoyed the sabbaths of which it had been robbed.

Biblical translations of the text of 2 Chr 36:20b-21 itself are not unambiguous. For example, the RSV reads:

... and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfil seventy years.

Here the seventy years apparently refer to the time in which the land, while desolate, was enjoying its sabbaths. According to the immediate context (36:17-19), the desolation began when this particular exile began (vs. 20). This was at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem (vs. 19) in 586 B.C.

The NIV translation, however, is less clearcut. It reads as follows:

... they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power. The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah.

Here the translators have radically shifted the reference to Jeremiah's prophecy from the beginning to the end of vs. 21, thereby relating it explicitly to "the" seventy years. Thus, the seventy years do not necessarily refer to the period of time that the land rested; instead, the translation appears to state that the land rested until Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy years *ended*.

There is some evidence, however, which indicates that the intent of the latter translation is correct. First, we must query as to which prophecy of Jeremiah—25:11-12 or 29:10— the Chronicler is

¹⁸E.g., see Whitley, "Captivity," p. 68.

referring. The Chronicler views the service of the Judeans to the King of Babylon until the time of the Persian rule a fulfillment of this prophecy. On the one hand, both the MT and the LXX of 25:11-12 refer to the end of Babylon at the end of the seventy years (although this is not explicit in the LXX), but only the LXX specifically mentions the exile as lasting seventy years. On the other hand, Jer 29:10 refers to the end of Babylon (MT and LXX), but it does not specifically underscore servitude for seventy years (although this seems to be implied). Only the MT of Jer 25:14 refers to other nations enslaving Babylon. And only Jer 29:10 refers to the return of the Jews from exile.

The best solution appears to be that the Chronicler conflated Jer 27:7 ("All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes; then many nations and great kings shall make him their slave") and 29:10. All of the elements in 2 Chr 36 relating to the seventy years are contained in these two texts. Also, Jer 29:10 seems to be the clearest source for the Chronicler (as opposed to 25:11-12) because it differentiates between the end of the seventy years and the return of the exiles afterwards. This the Chronicler picks up in 36:22-23, where he records that Cyrus issued a decree for the return of the exiles "that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished" (vs. 22). The Hebrew of this phrase is exactly the same as in 36:21, except for the use of *liḵlōt* ("to complete, finish, end") in vs. 22 instead of *leḡmallōt* ("to fulfill") in vs. 21. This implies that the Chronicler realized that Jeremiah's prophecy contained two distinct parts: the seventy years (which pertained to Babylon) and the return from exile (which was contingent on the end of the seventy years). Thus, while the overthrow of Babylon fulfilled (*mālē*) Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy years, Cyrus' decree completed or accomplished (*kālāh*) this prophecy by allowing for the return of the exiles.

A second and stronger reason as to why the intent of the NIV translation of 2 Chr 36:20b-21 is superior relates to the literary structure of the passage. In this passage there are two sets of parallel clauses either beginning with *ʿad* or *leḡmallōt*. Displaying the text according to a quasi-poetic style (in order to highlight the parallels) results in the following (my translation):

Line

- 1 And they were servants to him and his sons
 2 until (*ad*) the reign of the kingdom of Persia
 3 in order to fulfill (*l^emallôṭ*) the word
 4 of the LORD in the mouth of Jeremiah
 5 until (*ad*) the land enjoyed its sabbaths
 6 (all the days of its desolation
 7 it kept sabbath)
 8 in order to fulfill (*l^emallôṭ*) seventy years

Line 2 completes the thought of line 1, while lines 3-4 further clarify lines 1 and 2. Line 5, which starts with the same word as line 2, must be parallel to it. Precedent for this type of parallelism can be found in Exod 16:35:

And the people of Israel ate the manna forty years,
 till (*ad*) they came to a habitable land;
 they ate the manna,
 till (*ad*) they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

This parallelism can also be seen in Jer 1:3:

It came also in the days of Jehoiakim . . . ,
 and until (*ad*) the end of the eleventh year
 of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah,
 until (*ad*) the captivity of Jerusalem
 in the fifth month.

One more example of this type of parallelism is in 2 Chr 36:16, a text only a few verses away from the text under discussion:

But they kept mocking the messengers of God,
 despising his words,
 and scoffing at his prophets,
 till (*ad*) the wrath of the LORD rose
 against his people,
 till (*ad*) there was no remedy.

In all three examples, the second element beginning with “till/until” (*ad*) parallels temporally the first element beginning with the same word. One assumes the case is the same in 2 Chr 36:20b-21.

Line 8 of 2 Chr 36:20b-21 is parallel to lines 3-4 not only linguistically (*l^emallôṭ*) but also conceptually (Jeremiah prophesied the seventy years). Therefore it makes sense to take lines 6-7 as a parenthetical element further explaining line 5. This appears to disassociate the “seventy years” from delineating the length of time

for the years of sabbath rest. In other words, the land completed its enjoyment of the sabbath rests (which had begun after the desolation of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.) by the time of Persia's conquest of Babylon, this latter event marking the end of the seventy-year "rule" of Babylon.

On the other hand, arguments which attempt to connect the seventy years to the sabbath rest as compensation for 490 years of neglect of the sabbath rest,¹⁹ while attractive, cannot be supported from historical data and are hypothetical at best. While this criticism is based on an argument from silence, such an interpretation in any case skews the previous understanding of the implicit parallelisms within the text.

Thus one can conclude the following from 2 Chr 36:20b-21: (1) Jeremiah prophesied concerning the servitude of the Judeans to the Babylonians; (2) this servitude would end when the Persians came to power; (3) this same time marked the end of the period that the land enjoyed its sabbaths (i.e., the seventy years referred not to the duration of the time of desolation, but to the *end* of the period when the land enjoyed its sabbaths); (4) this *terminus* coincides with the end of Babylonian rule; and (5) the Chronicler apparently equated the end of the desolation of the land with the *beginning* of the rule of the Persians, even though the Judeans were still in exile at that time (the structure of the passage, at least, does not easily allow for a sharp distinction here). In any case, while the Chronicler has injected a new theological issue into the seventy-year prophecy (i.e., the sabbath rest of the land), he does not seem to have radically changed the meaning of Jeremiah's prophecy.

Daniel 9:2

The setting of Dan 9:2 is during the first year of Darius the Mede, the first person to rule Babylon after its overthrow (vs. 1). At this time Daniel understood the meaning of Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy years (vs. 2), and this caused him to pray a prayer of confession and repentance (vss. 3-19).

Once again, modern translations of vs. 2 are rather ambiguous as far as the timing of the seventy years is concerned. For example, the NIV states that "the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years." This forces one to conclude that the seventy years are

¹⁹Ibid.

symbolic, for Jerusalem by no accounts was desolate for seventy years. On the other hand, the RSV translates the verse so that the seventy years "must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem." This translation at least leaves open the possibility that the seventy years were completed *before* the end of Jerusalem's desolation (i.e., that the end of the desolation of Jerusalem was understood to be contingent upon the end of the seventy years).

And again there is the question as to the text to which Daniel was referring: Was it Jer 25:11-12 or 29:10? It would seem that Jer 29:10 was the source, since this text was part of a letter sent to the exiles (29:1), whereas Jer 25:11-12 was not. Also, Daniel's exile to Babylon during the third year of Jehoiakim (Dan 1:1-6) would seem to have denied him the opportunity to have heard Jeremiah's first mention of the seventy years, for this occurred during the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Jer 25:1).²⁰ On the other hand, however, neither Jer 25:11-12 nor 29:10 specifically mentions the desolation of Jerusalem, although both 25:11 (referring to the land) and Dan 9:2 contain forms of the root *ḥrb* ("to desolate/desolation").

An even more crucial question (and one which is easier to answer) is whether the end of the seventy years—from the standpoint of Dan 9—is still future or not. The evidence supports the view that it is past and not future.²¹ For one thing, "the number" (LXX: *ton arithmon*) of years in 9:2 alludes to Dan 5, where vs. 26 of the LXX states that the time of Belshazzar's kingdom has been numbered (*ērithmētai ho chronos sou tēs basileias*).²² The Aramaic of this verse—*m^enē⁷ m^enāh⁷ ʔelāha⁷ malkū⁷tāk* ("MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom")—means virtually the same. This fact plus the fact that *arithmeō* and *arithmos* occur only in Dan 5 and 9 becomes more significant when one realizes that: (1) the seventy years in Jeremiah—especially in 29:10—refer specifically

²⁰Of course, it cannot be proved that this text of Jeremiah did not arrive in Babylon at a later date. It is problematical that Jeremiah's prophecy in chap. 25 does not even assume a previous attack against Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

²¹For those who view the seventy years as future, see, e.g., Jacques Doukhan, "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9: An Exegetical Study," *AUSS* 17 (1979):1-22 (reprinted in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Studies*, eds. Arnold V. Wallenkampf and W. Richard Leshner [Washington, D.C., 1981], pp. 251-276, esp. p. 255); and William H. Shea, "The Relationship Between the Prophecies of Daniel 8 and Daniel 9," in Wallenkampf and Leshner, pp. 228-250, esp. p. 239.

²²Cf. vs. 17 (LXX).

to the end of Babylon; (2) Dan 5 refers to the end of the Babylonian empire; and (3) Dan 9 occurs shortly after its end.

Also, the urgent confessional nature of Daniel's prayer in 9:3-19 makes more sense when one understands the seventy years to be in the past. With the fact that Jer 29:10 explicitly relates the seventy years to Babylon (and Dan 5 implicitly supports this view), it is no wonder that Daniel, in the first year of Darius the Mede, prayed a prayer of confession on behalf of all the exiles. The reason for this is clear: although the seventy years for Babylon were past, the exiles were still in Babylon. Thus, Daniel understood the return of the exiles to be contingent upon the end of Babylon as an independent nation. But the sins of all Israel (vss. 4-15) had delayed the fulfillment of this part of the prophecy. Daniel was thus attempting to remove the last impediment to the return of the exiles by his prayer on behalf of Israel.²³

This understanding—that the seventy years were over—clarifies several things in Dan 9. First, whatever Daniel considered the relation between the seventy years and the desolation of Jerusalem to have been in Jeremiah,²⁴ the fact remained that though the seventy years were over, the desolation continued. In other words, whatever *should* have been the case had *not* been the case, and thus Daniel's prayer received its impetus from this fact. Second, the repetition of the phrase "in the first year" (9:2), referring to Darius' reign, becomes understandable when one realizes that Daniel was stunned by the fact that the exiles were still in Babylon *after* the overthrow of Babylon. And third, the reason for Daniel's plea for God to "delay not" (vs. 19) becomes apparent when one adopts a terminated framework for the seventy years, whereas the alternative—the seventy years as *about* to end—would, in the light of this plea, appear to portray Daniel as impatient, demanding, and distrustful of God's promises.

From the preceding discussion, one can see that Dan 9:2 does not demand the seventy years to be related to the desolation of Jerusalem historically. Also, Dan 5 sharply reduces the arguments

²³See W. Sibley Towner, "Retributional Theology in the Apocalyptic Setting," *USQR* 26 (1971):209-211; and André Lacocque, "The Liturgical Prayer in Daniel 9," *HUCA* 47 (1976):123-124.

²⁴The question concerning the reinterpretation of the seventy years as seventy heptads of years in Dan 9 (see, e.g., F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran*

that Daniel understood the seventy years to be symbolic in nature. Thus, the book of Daniel certainly *allows* the seventy years to be understood as literal.

3. Conclusion

In this article I have sought to demonstrate that an analysis of Jer 25:11-12, Jer 29:10, 2 Chr 36:20b-21, and Dan 9:2 produces three items of significance for the interpretation of the seventy years. First, the seventy years dealt primarily with Babylon (especially in the MT of Jeremiah), and the return from exile was understood to be contingent on its fulfillment. Second, the seventy years in Jeremiah seem best suited to a literal period of time. And third, 2 Chr 36:20b-21 and Dan 9:2 do not necessitate a symbolic understanding of the seventy years. In the concluding article, I will inquire as to whether the foregoing analysis is verified by historical data.

Texts [Grand Rapids, MI, 1959], pp. 7-8, 15, and 60-61) is not under discussion here. Rather, I am concerned with Daniel's original understanding of the seventy-year prophecy.