Was Jesus's Arrival Accurately Predicted in the Bible?

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In 538 BC, the angel Gabriel gave Daniel a prophecy pinpointing when the Messiah would arrive. "Know and understand this," Gabriel told him (Daniel 9:25). While Daniel may have understood it, somewhere along the way that insight has been lost. Old Testament scholars have long been debating the prophecy's meaning, but one scholar, Harold Hoehner, had a particularly astounding interpretation (*Harold W. Hoehner, Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977*).

While in Babylon, Daniel read the Scriptures, learning that Jeremiah had foretold both the Babylonian captivity and the Israelites' return to their homeland after 70 years. In response, Daniel confessed the sins of the nation in prayer, inciting the angel Gabriel to visit and deliver this message:

> *Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed (Daniel 9:25–26).*

Breaking Down the Daniel Prophecy

In taking a closer look at the Daniel passage, one thing is clear: it is about the Messiah. We see that the term "Messiah," or "Anointed One," is capitalized. It is also clear that a formula of sorts is provided to calculate when the Messiah will appear. The difficulties come in interpreting the formula. One such difficulty is determining the meaning of "weeks," which is used in a number of translations. (NIV uses the term "sevens" instead of "weeks.") In ancient Hebrew, "weeks" had a number of meanings, which scholars can determine by the context. The context in the Daniel passage shows that "weeks" means "seven units." Using this definition, we can calculate when the Messiah will arrive: (7 x 7) + (62 x 7) = 49 + 434 = 483 years.

The prophecy further says that *after* the Messiah arrives, he will be "put to death and will have nothing." The word "after" is very important. After the Messiah arrives, he will be put to death. Jesus's crucifixion fulfills that prophecy.

We now know that the Messiah would arrive 483 years in the future. But does the prophecy specify a beginning date? The prophecy tells us: "From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem." So, who ordered this decree to restore Jerusalem, and when was it ordered? There are several possibilities, but the decree that best fits the evidence was made by the Persian king Artaxerxes to Nehemiah on March 5 of 444 BC (Nehemiah 2:1–8). (In this article, a number of biblical dates are used, all of which have been under debate by scholars for hundreds of years. Harold Hoehner makes a strong case for each of the dates. For those details, please refer to Hoehner's book *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*.)

Before we can make some calculations, we need to know how Daniel's civilization counted time—by a solar year or a lunar year. A solar year has 365 days, 5 hours, 48
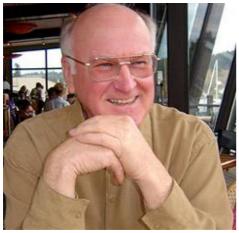
minutes, and 46 seconds, or 365.2422 days. A lunar year has exactly 360 days: 12 months of 30 days. [A lunar year has 12 rotation periods, or lunar months, which equal 354.367 Earth days (12 x 29.53059). However, ancient peoples rounded off the lunar month to 30 days. Thus, their lunar year would equal 360 days (30 days x 12).] Since the lunar year was commonly used in ancient biblical times, it makes the most sense to use the lunar year in calculations.

We must also decide how to define the arrival of the Messiah. Do we use Jesus's birthdate, the date he began his ministry, the date of his crucifixion, or some other date? The date that many scholars have accepted as the time of the Messiah's arrival is Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The reason for choosing this date is that this is when Jesus publicly declared that he was the Messiah. Before then, he told only select people, like his disciples, and he often reminded them to keep his identity secret. History chronologists have estimated that Jesus's triumphal entry fell on Monday, March 30, AD 33.

Calculating Gabriel's Formula

Now we're ready to do some math to determine if Gabriel did in fact predict Jesus's arrival. We'll start by determining how many days are in 483 lunar years: 360 x 483 = 173,880 days. Next, we'll convert those days back into solar years: 173,880 ÷ 365.2422 = 476.068 years. After converting the decimal part (0.068) to days (0.068 x 365.2422 = 24.8 days), the time prophesized for the Messiah to arrive comes out to be 476 years and 25 days.

Adding this number to March 5, 444 BC—the date on which the decree to rebuild Jerusalem was issued—brings us to March 30, AD 33, the very day of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Is this match not remarkable? The remarkable accuracy of the predictions in the prophecy in Daniel [assuming the estimates are correctly interpreted and accurate] supports the truth of the prophecy, which in turn builds confidence in the authority and reliability of the Bible.

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