

## Bible Study from an Archaeological Perspective

### Lesson Seven

Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods (ca. 539 B.C. – A.D. 70)

#### THE DUAL EMPIRE (539 B.C. to 333 B.C.)

Daniel 8:1-4 – *In the third year of the reign of king Belshazzar a vision appeared unto me, even unto me Daniel... And I saw in a vision...there stood before the river a ram which had two horns...one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last. I saw the ram pushing westward and northward, and southward...*

Daniel 8:20 – *The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia.*

According to World History, the dual kingdom of Medo-Persia followed Babylon. The Medo-Persian empire was a dual power, but the Persians were the stronger of the two. Though Darius the Mede was a great conqueror and conquered the so-called impregnable city of Babylon it was Cyrus the Persian and his Persian Empire that eventually reigned supreme.

(c. 700 B.C.) Isaiah 44:24, 28 – *That saith of **Cyrus**, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: **even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.***

Isaiah 45:1-4 – *Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to **Cyrus**, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that **I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name**, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, **I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.***

Isaiah 46:10-11 – *Declaring the end 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.*

According to Josephus, Daniel may have shown Cyrus these verses in Isaiah: “Thus says Cyrus the king: Since God Almighty has appointed me to be king of the habitable earth, I believe that he is the God which the nation of the Israelites worship; for indeed he foretold my name by the prophets, and that I should build him a house at Jerusalem, in the country of Judah” (Antiquities 11.1.1).

**“This was known to Cyrus by his reading the book of his prophecies which Isaiah left behind him two hundred and twenty years before.\*** For that prophet had said, that God had spoken thus to him in a secret vision: ‘My will is that Cyrus, whom I have appointed to be king over many great nations, shall send back my people to their own land, and build my temple.’ This was foretold by Isaiah one hundred and forty years before the temple was demolished.

**Accordingly, when Cyrus read this, and admired the divine power, an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfil what was written;** so he called the most eminent Jews that were in Babylon, and told them that he gave them leave to go back to their own country, and to rebuild their city Jerusalem and the temple of God, for he would be their friend, and would write to the governors and satraps that were in the neighbourhood of their country of Judaea, to contribute to them gold and silver for the building of the temple, and besides that beasts for their sacrifices” (Antiquities 11.1.2). [\*It was 161 yrs. between Isaiah and Cyrus.]

(535 B.C.) Ezra 1:1-2 – *Now 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, and put it also in writing, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.***

#### **Archaeological evidence:**

Excavated at Babylon in 1879, the Cylinder was written in Babylonian cuneiform on the orders of the Persian king Cyrus the Great after the capture of Babylon. Among other things, the cylinder records how he restored shrines and allowed deported peoples to return home, prompting some people to call it “the world’s first charter of human rights.”



**The Cyrus Cylinder**



Darius I, siglos (5g), c. 521-505 B.C. Type I.



Darius I, 1/3 siglos (1.71g), c. 505-486 B.C. Type II.



Darius I, 1/3 siglos (1.71g) Type II.



Artaxerxes I, siglos (5.52g), c. 450-375 B.C. Type III

(539 B.C.) Daniel 9:1-3 – *In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; **In the first year of his reign I Daniel 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 desolations of Jerusalem.** And I set my face unto the LORD God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes.*

Daniel 9:21-24 – *Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision. 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 anoint the most Holy.*

The 70 weeks (70 sevens) are seventy 7-year periods or **490 prophetic years**, which relate to Daniel's people, and the city of Jerusalem. As will be shown, the fulfillment of this prophecy

began in 445 B.C. Had there been continuous fulfillment, the glorious ending (v. 24) would have occurred about A.D. 39 (7 years after the triumphal entry and the crucifixion).

- But, would you consider the Children of Israel to be free from sin today? Do they currently possess everlasting righteousness? We are experiencing a pause in fulfillment of this prophecy; a time-gap which, as will be shown, began in A.D. 32 (after 69 weeks [483 prophetic years] of fulfillment). Fulfillment of the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel's prophecy will resume in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, with the trump of God when we (believers) are caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air!

Daniel 9:25 – *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.***

Nehemiah, writing by divine inspiration, records the exact date of this decree:

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. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, 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 it. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? **So it pleased the king to send me;** and I set him a time. 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.***

Dr. Alva McClain, former president of Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, Indiana wrote:

“For those who believe in biblical inspiration and the genuineness of predictive prophecy, it will be no surprise to learn that the date fixed by Nehemiah happens to be one of the best-known dates in ancient history. Even the latest edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, certainly not biased in favor of prophecy, sets the date of Artaxerxes accession as 465 B.C.; and therefore, his twentieth year would be 445 B.C. ...Here we have the beginning of the Seventy Weeks” (Alva J. McClain, *Daniel's prophecy of the Seventy Weeks*, 1962, pp. 18-19).

Daniel 9:25c ...*the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times* – read Nehemiah 4:7-8, 17-21; Nehemiah 12:27, 31, 38, 43.



**Persian period walkway atop Hezekiah's rebuilt wall in Area D2.** Credit: Bud Chrysler

The first "***seven weeks***" of years ( $7 \times 7 = 49$  years) in Daniel's vision cover the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the period of rebuilding during the "*troublous times*" between 445 B.C. and 396 B.C.

From this point (396 B.C.), the "***threescore and two weeks***" ( $62 \times 7 = 434$  prophetic years), of Daniel 9:25, will bring us "*unto Messiah the Prince,*" A.D. 32. [Luke 19:28-42]



**JUDAEA**, Achaemenid Province (Yehud). Jerusalem mint. Circa 375-332 B.C. **Silver Gerah** (7mm, 0.50g).

## HELLENISTIC AND EARLY ROMAN PERIODS (332 B.C. – A.D. 70)



**JUDAEA. "YHD"** Hellenistic period. **Ptolemy II**, Silver. Jerusalem mint. Ca. 272-260 B.C. **Silver Hemiobol** (0.25 g – 8mm).

Uri Avida, Rodney E. Soher Curator of Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Periods, Israel Museum, wrote, "In purely political terms the early phase of the Hellenistic period can be subdivided as follows: the **conquests of Alexander** and the wars of the Diadochs (332 – 301 B.C.); **Egyptian Ptolemaic rule** (301 – 200 B.C.); **Syrian Seleucid rule** (200 – 167 B.C.). During these periods most of the country was a vast battleground for the warring kingdoms to the north and the south. At the same time it was a fertile ground – especially in the coastal strip, in Transjordan, and in some other areas – for the insemination of Greek culture and the adoption of the Greek polis as the favored form of political organization. Consequently, there was an influx of settlers from other parts of the Hellenistic world, as well as the introduction of Greek cults and the formation of a Greek-speaking elite. These aspects of the Greek culture so permeated the local non-Jewish civilization that they survived throughout Roman rule" (Uri Avida, *Treasures of the Holy Land – Ancient Art from the Israel Museum*, 1986, p. 192).

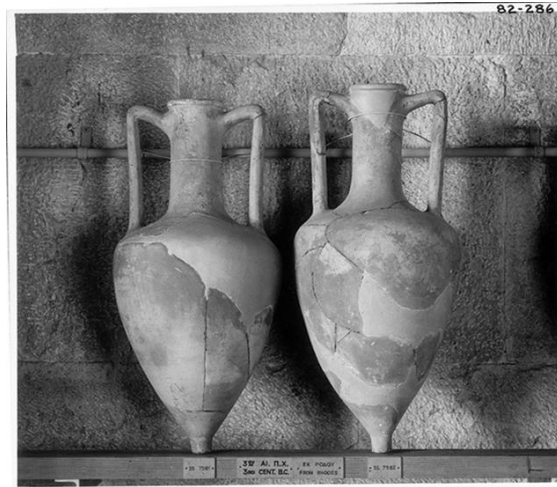
The prophet Daniel predicted that war would be fought between the **Medo-Persian** and **Grecian** empires and prophesied its outcome--[a Greek victory]. It was precisely fulfilled just as he predicted over 200 years later in 332 B.C. This remarkable vision of Daniel Chapter 8 begins with this prophecy regarding the conflict between Medo-Persia and Greece:

Daniel 8:5,7,8,21 – *And as I was considering, behold, an he-goat came from the west on the face of the whole earth, and touched not the ground: and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes... and smote the ram and brake his two horns: and there was no power in the ram and brake his two horns: and there was no power in the ram to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground, and stamped upon him... the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king (Alexander the Great).*

### **Archaeological/historical evidence:**

At 20 years of age Alexander began his military campaign and conquered all the civilized world from Greece to India and from Southern Russia to Northern Africa, in only 10 years! [He conquered the Persian Empire in 332 B.C. at the battle of Issus]. But just as he was at the height of his power 'when he was strong' at the young age of only 33 years, Alexander died. When

Alexander fell, his four generals divided his empire up into four major divisions (Daniel 11:3-4). Two of these divisions are prominent in Daniel's vision in chapter 11 – the kings of the North and South. We know them as the **Seleucid** and **Ptolemaic** dynasties.



**3rd century B.C. Greek – Terracotta amphora** with long neck and pointed bottom, of unpainted clay.



**Stamped Rhodian amphora handle found in Jerusalem.** Credit: Bud Chrysler

“The stamped Rhodian amphora handle reads EPI [= from the year of] KLEONYMOY [Kleonumos, the eponym's name] DIOSTHNYOY [Diosthnuos, the name of the Rhodian month]. This is a handle dated by Kleonumos II, who officiated in ca. 197 B.C.” (Donald Ariel – Head of coin department - Israel Antiquities Authority).

### **Antiochus IV Epiphanes (r. 175 B.C. to 164 B.C.).**

Daniel 8:8-9 – *Therefore the he goat waxed very great: and when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven. **And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land.***

The “little horn” here is a prophecy fulfilled in Antiochus IV Epiphanes, B.C. 175, who profaned the temple and persecuted the Jews. He is not to be confused with the “little horn” of Daniel 7, who is yet to come, and who will dominate the earth during the great tribulation (Daniel’s seventieth week).

Until the time of Antiochus IV, the Seleucid Kingdom governed Judaea with a hands-off approach that did not interfere with Jewish laws or custom. Antiochus reversed this policy, outlawing Jewish dietary rules and outlawing the study of the Torah. **He went so far as to declare himself "God Manifest," and to place that inscription on his coinage.** He placed an altar to Zeus in the Temple and sacrificed a pig on it in 167 B.C. This outrage led to the Maccabee Revolt.



**Antiochus IV, 175-164 B.C.** Bronze 34 mm, 36.88 grams, Antioch mint 169-168 B.C. Obverse: Laureate head of Serapis right, wearing tainia with Osiris cap. Reverse: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΝΤΙΟΧΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ (King Antiochus – God Manifest).

“The latest phase of the Late Hellenistic and the Early Roman periods can be subdivided as follows: **the Hasmonaean uprising against the Seleucids (167 – 141 B.C.)**; the Hasmonaean state (141 – 63 B.C.); Pompey’s conquest and the establishment of a Roman vassal state (63 – 40 B.C.); **Herod’s kingdom (40 B.C. – A.D. 6)**; direct Roman rule (A.D. 6 – 66); **the Jewish War against the Romans and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (A.D. 66 – 70)**” (Uri Avida, *Treasures of the Holy Land – Ancient Art from the Israel Museum*, 1986, p. 192).

**Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, appears on the scene.**

*Matthew 2:1-3 – Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*





**Judaea. Herod the Great. 8 Prutah** – Obverse: ΗΡΩΔΟ[Υ] [ΒΑΣΙ]ΛΕΩΣ Tripod, ceremonial bowl (lebes) above, **date ΛΓ (year 3 = 37 B.C.)** and monogram [TP] in field right. Reverse: Military helmet, facing, with cheek pieces and straps, [star] above flanked by two palm branches.

Daniel 9:25 – *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.*

The 69th week (62 + 7) of Daniel’s prophecy ended in A.D. 32 (unto Messiah the Prince), which leaves us with **one-week** (7 years) remaining to complete the prophecy of the seventy weeks. 32 A.D. + 7 = 39 A.D. But notice that mention of the 70th week does not begin until verse 27, and we have yet to read verse 26.

Daniel 9:26 – *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.*

Daniel 9:26a And **after** threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be **cut off**, but not for himself...

Isaiah 53:8 ...**for he was cut off out of the land of the living**: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

Arno Gaebelein (assistant to C.I. Scofield) wrote: “He appeared in Jerusalem on exactly the day on which the 69 prophetic year weeks expired and a few days later He was put to death on the cross” (Gaebelein, 1911, p. 141).

The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ was an event which followed the close of the 69th week but preceded the beginning of the 70th week. One more event must occur following the close of the 69<sup>th</sup> week but preceding the beginning of the 70<sup>th</sup> week.

Daniel 9:26b ...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 (the symbol of invading armies).

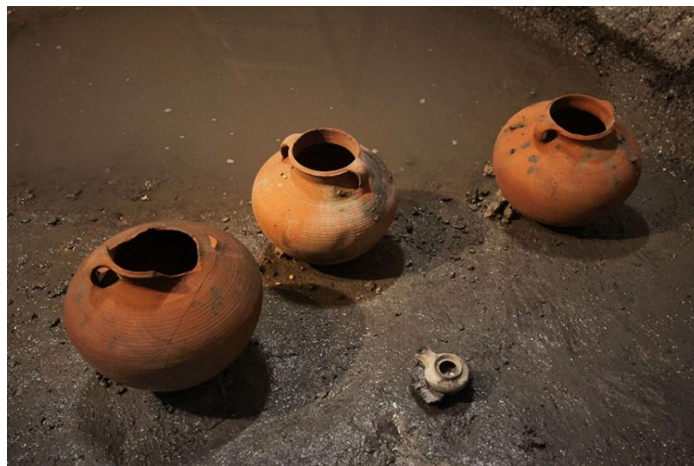
Luke 19:43-44 – *For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.*

Gabelein wrote: “The Romans under Titus Vespasianus in the year A.D. 70 fulfilled this prediction and in that year the prophecy before us became history. But Titus is not ‘the prince that shall come’ (Gaebelein, 1911, p. 142).

Luke 21:5-6 – *And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.*



**Evidence of the Roman siege of 70 A.D**



**Evidence of the Roman siege of 70 A.D.** Cooking pots and lamp found in a cistern in a drainage channel near Robinson’s Arch, Jerusalem. IAA Photo by Vladimir Naykhin.



**COOKING POT – JERUSALEM – Herodian period (37 B.C. – A.D. 70).** Round-bodied with a short neck terminating in a grooved rim. Cooking pots were pierced to render them unusable due to purity concerns (as proposed by Avigad, Meir Ben-Dov, and others). Reference: Holy Land Pottery At The Time Of Jesus, Stanislao Loffreda, 2003, pp. 73-81.



**HERODIAN OIL LAMP – ISRAEL – Herodian period (37 B.C. – A.D. 70).** Wheel-made with crescent-shaped nozzle attached.

- Did the 70th and final week began after the destruction of the Temple? Again, I ask, would you consider the Children of Israel to be free from sin today? Do they currently possess everlasting righteousness? We are experiencing a pause in fulfillment of this prophecy; a time-gap which, as we have shown, began in A.D. 32 (after 69 weeks [483 prophetic years] of fulfillment). Fulfillment of the 70th week of Daniel's prophecy will resume in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, with the trump of God when we (believers) are caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air!
- II Thessalonians 2:6-9

I Corinthians 15:45

We began this series talking about the first man, Adam, and we will end this series now with mention of the last Adam, who was made a quickening spirit.

Romans 5:12; 17-18

*Romans 6:22-23 – But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*