

The “Seventy Sevens” (Daniel 9:24) in Light of Heptadic Themes in Qumran

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Daniel 9:24 is fraught with puzzling language, particularly the meaning of the “seventy sevens.” Rather than add to the relevant commentaries, this paper approaches the phrase in light of the heptadic language we find in select Qumran sources. Jubilees, 1 Enoch, and related scrolls portray these heptadic structures as primarily theological expressions, with chronology either set in the background or absent altogether. I suggest this context casts the seventy sevens in a new light, wherein it serves a mainly theological function instead of a rigid temporal one. Beginning with a brief examination of each major extracanonical source, we will consider two theological implications that come as a result of these texts’ reception of Daniel: first, Daniel’s seventy sevens may need to be considered a theological image; second, the image likely paints a picture of exile and restoration in its fullness, spanning all epochs, not just the Babylonian, Media-Persian, and Seleucid-Hasmonean crises. The conclusion notes how such literary and theological moves may also point to a deliberate shape inherent to Dan 9, one that includes subsequent, interpretive communities, such as Qumran and its sects.

KEYWORDS: *Daniel 9, seventy sevens, Qumran*

The case of the “seventy sevens” (Dan 9:24) remains one of the most enigmatic in the book of Daniel.¹ What do these references signify?

1. Studies that trace the connections between Daniel and Qumran range from broad, thematic treatments to a small handful of submissions on the seventy sevens and their counterparts in select scrolls: Peter Flint, “The Daniel Tradition at Qumran,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception, Volume 2* (ed. John Collins and Peter W. Flint; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 41–60; Alexandra Grund, *Die Entstehung des Sabbats: Seine Bedeutung für Israels Zeitkonzept und Erinnerungskultur* (FAT 75; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Christoph Berner, *Jahre, Jahrwochen und Jubiläen: Heptadische Geschichtskonzeptionen im Antiken Judentum* (BZAW 363; Berlin: DeGruyter, 2006); Matthias Henze, “Daniel and Jubilees,” in *Enoch and the Mosaic Torah: The Evidence of*

Strikingly, there are various numbers and heptadic structures (sevens, seventy, Sabbath, etc.) included in Qumran texts circulating at a time when Daniel was already well-known and well-received. Some of these apocalyptic and quasi-apocalyptic texts subsequent to Daniel's exilic text provide insight as to how the heptadic language in 9:24 was likely read by its original audience. Specifically, language emphasizing Sabbath and heptadic references in these later, extracanonical texts—here, *Jubilees*, *1 Enoch*, and pseudo-Daniel, primarily—prove useful for ascertaining the many sides of this multi-faceted literary convention.

With these points in mind, this paper argues that a specific cross-section of Qumran texts lends credence to a *literary-theological* understanding of Daniel's seventy sevens, marking it as a time image rather than a rigid, chronological sum. At least two theological implications may be drawn from this thesis: (a) the structure "seventy sevens" is, foremost, a *theological* construct and that (b) full restoration of Israel (and all of creation) is bound up in the *entirety* of created time, not just the temporal orbit of the second century B.C. (history, exile, sin; vv. 24, 27). Granting there are associations to events surrounding this period, I suggest Qumran evidence adds a depth dimension to our reading of the seventy sevens in Dan 9:24 that has been given sparse attention in earlier studies.

JUBILEES AND DANIEL 9:24–27

Parallels are frequently drawn between *Jubilees* (ca. 150 B.C.) and Daniel in terms of eschatology, philosophy, political attitudes, and time-imagery. The impetus for the book is, coincidentally, a revelation received by Moses (cf. Exod 24:12, 15–18) by means of an *angeles interpres* (50:2; Dan 9:20–23).² Of particular interest, however, is the

Jubilees (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 52–66; Lorenzo DiTommaso, "4QPseudo-Daniel^{A-B} (4Q243–4Q244) and the Book of Daniel," *DSD* 12 (2005): 101–33. One of the few studies specifically treating the heptadic chronology is a contribution by Divorah Dimant ("The Seventy Weeks Chronology [Dan 9,24–27] in the Light of New Qumranic Texts," in *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings* [ed. A.S. van der Woude; BETL 106; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993], 57–76). See also Lester Grabbe, "The Seventy-Weeks Prophecy (Daniel 9:24–27) in Early Jewish Interpretation," in *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, Band 1* (ed. Hermann Diels; Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1954), 595–611. George Athas' work is a recent example of a synchronic approach to Daniel 9:24–27 ("In Search of the Seventy 'Weeks' of Daniel 9," *JHS* 9 [2009]: 1–20).

2. The intention of the book, according to Ruiten, "is to confirm the authenticity and authority of its version of the revelation of Moses" (Jacque van Ruiten, "Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Jubilees: The Case of the Early Abram [Jub. 11:14–12:15]"

heptadic language permeating *Jubilees*. Using a rolling chronological system of 2,450 years, *Jubilees* moves from creation to Israel’s imminent entrance into Canaan (cf. 1:29; 50:4). This total is further divided by a heptadic structure—the periodic celebration of a “sabbaticalized” Jubilees (every 49 [7x7] years or seven year-weeks). With this device, the author can mark 49 sets of 50-year units or 2,450 years total.³

Jubilees also bases its telic perspective on the phrase “in the year of jubilee” (בשנת היובל), from Leviticus (cf. 25:10–54; 27:17–24; cf. Num 36:4), and is eschatologically charged through its contact with Deut 15:2—“the *final days* (לאחרית הימים) concerning the captives.”⁴ Sabbath elements are not only borrowed from Torah, it seems, but fuel the theological reasoning behind these time images.⁵ Likewise, Dan 9:24–27, as well as the preceding prayer (9:3–19), bases much of its heptadic logic on Leviticus and Exodus.⁶

in *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism* [ed. Matthias Henze; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 123); cf. Hindy Naiman, “Interpretation as Primordial Writing: Jubilees and Its Authority Conferring Strategies,” *JSJ* 30 (1999): 379–410.

3. Leviticus, however, marks the jubilee (יובל) at periods of 50 years, not 49 years (25:10–11). Clearly, these images of time are being stretched and reconfigured. The significance, therefore, does not fully lie with the themes shared by *Jubilees* and Leviticus, but in the manner in which the author transforms these images in order to make a statement about time and restoration as a whole.

4. The clear jubilee-teleology of *11QMelchizedek* is also a valuable resource for comparing Sabbath-heptadic structures; in this case, it interacts with Isaianic prophecy. At a textual level, the author combines the words of Dan 9:24–27 and Isa 52:7 in order to proclaim “the year of favor” or “to proclaim liberty to the captives” (Matthias Henze, “The Use of Scripture in the Book of Daniel,” in *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism*, 151). As Puech terms it, the focal point of the text is “the tenth jubilee as the age of redemption” (É. Puech, “Notes sur le manuscrit de X1QMelkisedeq,” *RevQ* 12 [1987]: 483–513, here 483). There is also a divergence: the final years and days of the text’s heptadic sequence consist of the administration of justice, referring to Ps 82:1–2 (cf. *Jub.* 7:8–9).

5. Sabbath theology, for example, is regarded so highly in *Jubilees* that it affects the Qumranic calendration. Events transpired almost exclusively on a Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday—i.e., not a Sabbath day (Martin Abegg, “The Calendar at Qumran,” in *Judaism in Late Antiquity, Volume 1* [ed. Alan Avery-Peck and Jacob Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 2001], 148). He continues, “If this is purposeful, and it does appear that at some level it is, those who promulgated a three hundred and sixty-four-day calendar during the late Second Temple period might be conservative rather than innovative in their calendrical views” (148). The full weight of Sabbath observance is on display in Qumran texts just as much as in Danielic texts, but the manner in which it is displayed differs.

6. Ron Haydon, “‘The Law and the Prophets’ in MT Daniel 9:3–19,” *BBR* 24 (2014): 15–26.

The *terminus* for *Jubilees* is “unto the year of grace (לשנת הרצון) of Melchizedek” (50:8–9). What is striking is the use of heptads to convey a message: 49 jubilee-units pass “from the days of Adam until this day and one week and two years” (50:4), with historical events delineated by heptads in between, finishing with the final, fiftieth year-week. Time culminates in the last Jubilee, or as VanderKam calls it, “the climax of chronology.”⁷ This last jubilee unit reveals multiple layers of fulfillment—the Promised Land, new creation and everlasting righteousness—which is reminiscent of the fulfillment in Dan 9:24. The bulk of the time image is unpacked at the front of Dan 9:24–27 while the author enhances and lengthens the description of the final “week” (vv. 26–27).

Moreover, *Jubilees* is preoccupied with communicating an “enduring exile” (1:15–18) from within its large-scale heptadic structure.⁸ The primary difference between Daniel and *Jubilees*, it seems, is in the motif each uses to sketch the expanse of continuous exile. For Daniel, exile is sketched according to the stages of human rulership; for *Jubilees*, it is sketched according to the actual periods of exile, supplemented by the evils that befall God’s people. Still, using these heptadic, literary devices to paint the picture of exile-restoration, while under the umbrella of Sabbath theology, indicates a partial, shared understanding of how these images were configured, conveyed, and read.

ENOCHIC TEXTS AND DANIEL 9:24–27

Many Enochic texts make little effort to hide the integration of Danielic material, especially Daniel’s use of heptadic structures.⁹ The text of *1 Enoch* (late 3rd–2nd century B.C.) sketches a loose timeline of “seven weeks” over the course of which the “chosen righteous” will endure and receive from God “sevenfold teaching concerning his whole creation”

7. James C. VanderKam, “Questions of Canon Viewed through the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *BRR* 11 (2001): 125.

8. Martien Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile: The Metaphorization of Exile in the Hebrew Bible* (VTSup 141; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 9–10.

9. The *Enochic Astronomical Book* (4QEnastr^a) is a version of *1 En.* 72–82 that reportedly precedes the final form of Daniel—setting the scroll around the late third century B.C. or early second century B.C. (Dimant, “The Seventy Weeks,” 59); see also A. Mertens, *Das Buch Daniel im Lichte der Texte vom Toten Meer* (SBM 12; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1971). The *Damascus Rule* (CD), according to Mertens, is also the first of a long line of commentaries on Dan 9:24–27.

(93:10; cf. Dan 12:10–13).¹⁰ In the latter section of the book, we find the following heptadic structuring of time: “Then after that there shall be many weeks (שבעות) without number forever; it shall be (a time) of goodness and righteousness, and sin shall no more be heard of forever” (91:17).¹¹ At the advent of the “new heaven” at the end of the scroll, we translate the “first heaven” passes away after the “tenth week,” after which the final heaven will “brighten and rise for all eternity seven times” (4Q212 4.23–26). Apart from the theological parallels to Dan 9:24–27 (cf. “end of sin”), the “weeks” are escalated to a degree of a-temporality. The figurative nature of the expression is more pronounced since neither Daniel nor Enoch includes the specification, “years” (שנים). In this way, the heptadic nature of the “week” serves as a passage of time and not a seven-day unit.

The author also adds that, like Daniel, the interpretation of “weeks” comes out of a “recounting from the books” (ד[ה] . . . [ן]בון מתלה; 93:1, 3). Again, we find the *Enoch* author donning the mantle of Daniel, both in language and purpose. However, unlike *Jubilees* or Daniel, the heptads in *Enoch* convey a much more stylized and figurative sense.¹² In the “Book of the Watchers” (*1 En.* 1–36), for example, the offspring of angelic-human parentage were to be bound for “seventy generations” in crevices of the earth “unto the day of judgment” (10:12). Heptadic descriptors in *Enoch* can even express their theological meaning without any reference to time, as with the “seventy shepherds” (89:59–77). These literary conventions—heptadic markers, intertexts, emulating Daniel—tell us such nuances were at least possible, if not likely, at the inception of Daniel’s own heptadic structuring.

10. Cf. Roger T. Beckwith, “The Significance of the Calendar for Interpreting Essene Chronology and Eschatology,” *RevQ* 38 (1980): 167–202.

11. James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Volume 1, Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009). He gives the optional translation of “sabbaths.” In an Aramaic translation from one *Enoch* scroll (4QEn^s ar), we find the word שביע shares the same lettering as the Hebrew singular from Dan 9:24 (שבעים).

12. Texts such as *Enoch* and *Jubilees* use a particular “solar” calendar (364-day year) whereas most ANE texts use a 29.5 day/month “lunar” calendar (354-day year) (Abegg, “Calendar,” 146). We cannot dismiss how these calendrical values in *Enoch* and *Jubilees* are interlaced throughout their theological expressions while still keeping a considerable semantic distance from the time-images in these texts.

OTHER SCROLLS AND DANIEL 9:24–27

In the *Rule of the Congregation* (1QS), the term שבוע designates “a week of years” or a point in every seven years (1QS 10.7–8; also CD 16.4; [ש]בועותיהם). 1QS 10.7–8 also includes the designation, “seasons” (מועדי) into its heptadic structure, possibly to unite the Levitical institution more closely to a unit of time, as with “seasons of the years up to their seven-year periods” (מועדי שנים לשבועיהם). The construction may point to an active/passive relationship (“sevens sevens”) similar to the effect of a singular verb and a plural subject (e.g., “unleavened bread” [מצות יאכל], Exod 13:7). While not the exact same construction as in Dan 9:24, the wording is still familiar. The heptads—here, compounded—relay a theological message in the first instance and then a chronological message in a secondary capacity. Similarly, the *Damascus Document* refers to “the book (ספר) of the divisions of the periods according to their jubilees and their weeks (שבועותיהם)” (CD 16.3–4). “Weeks,” here, convey *divisions* of time rather than a timespan in itself. With the exception of CD 16, these sources maintain a broad stance on Sabbath and eschatological fulfillment, *without* recourse to the details of Lev 25:1–55 (esp. vv. 8–10).¹³ A noticeable pattern emerges and, as is apparent with the scrolls above, begins to coalesce into a convention recognized by these communities.

Additional clues from *pseudo-Daniel* (4Q243), dated to the early first century A.D. also help refine the picture of heptadic structures that we find in the canonical Daniel.¹⁴ These scrolls (4Q196–4Q363)

13. Roger Beckwith (“Early Traces of the Book of Daniel,” *TynBul* 53 [2002]: 74–82) argues that these various intertestamental works (Tobit, *1 Enoch*, and Ecclesiasticus) received Daniel in such a way as to front the book’s prophetic message and expand its eschatological claims. This is certainly true of Qumran. These are intertestamental communities with their own “chronological purposes” (David Miano, *Shadow on the Steps: Time Measurement in Ancient Israel* [SBLRBS 64; Atlanta: SBL, 2010], 73).

14. Dimant, “Seventy Weeks,” 60. In close proximity to the Danielic psedapigrapha, 1–2 Maccabees (2nd century B.C.) also “theologizes” heptads by tailoring specific dates to possess Sabbath-heptadic features. In 1 Macc 6, the author describes Judas Maccabee offering surrender to Antiochus V and relinquishing the city of Beth-zur, due to starvation. Occurring in 163–162 B.C., the writer shifted the calendar (not Elul [164–163], but Tishri [163–162]) in order to align the starvation with the observance of *shemittah*, because “it was the seventh year” (6:53). To see this same historical accommodation working in Josephus and other Maccabean texts, see Ben Zion Wacholder, “The Calendar of Sabbath Years During the Second Temple Era: A Response,” in *Origins of Judaism, Religion, History, and Literature in Late Antiquity*, Vol. 5, Part 2 (ed. Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green; New York: Garland, 1990), 193–203. Aramaic literature dating after the rededication of the Temple (164 B.C.) also depends on Daniel, not unlike the historical “appropriation” of events by 1–2 Maccabees (cf. 4:36–59; 2 Macc 10:1–8; Dan

highlight aspects of Danielic theology, its reception and, in some cases, its use of “seventy years.” Our first instinct may be to see this number representing Jeremiah’s heptadic count of the Babylonian Exile (25:11; 29:10). But Peter Flint, in analyzing “seventy years” (שבעין שנים [4Q243 16.1]), claims that an alternative significance is possible.¹⁵ The Qumran author may have an apocalyptic narrative in mind, covering the sweep of Israelite history as opposed to a single, series of events.¹⁶ What is more, the author is clearly in touch with the Daniel tradition. As Flint continues,

The literature proves in spite of their *Naherewartung* the Qumranites (and related Essene circles) were eager to connect the destiny and future of their movement not only with the history of Israel, but also with universal history and its end along the lines prevalent in proto-Masoretic Daniel.¹⁷

Units of “seventy years,” therefore, continued to carry theological import in post-Danielic literature, by virtue of their ability to carry a particular theological value.¹⁸

11). We can compare, for example, the events of “the abomination of desolation” in 1 Macc 1:54 to Dan 11:31, 12:11; cf. 9:27. When a sequence of historical events appear in the apocalyptic interim literature, it is possible—and, in some cases, likely—that the account relies on the shaped historical events of Daniel itself (e.g. 8:13–14, Dan 11).

15. Flint, “The Daniel Tradition,” 340.

16. LXX Daniel 9:24 (OG) likewise interprets the seventy sevens as a time image that spans Israelite history. Writers achieved this by dividing the content of 9:24–27 according to two different schemes of chronology: first, the “seventy weeks for . . . Zion” and, second, “seven and seventy and sixty two weeks” (v. 26). Though two different schemes are conveyed, the timeframes refer to the same events. Within the “seventy weeks” the vision is to be “consummated” (συντελέω), while “the consummation of times” (συντελέω καιρῶν) in v. 27 is “after seven years and seventy times and sixty-two times, until the time of the consummation of the war.” Notably, the “seventy weeks” of LXX 9:24 is an image *representing* the augmented timeframe—“seven and seventy and sixty-two weeks”—unfolding in LXX 9:26–27.

17. Flint, “The Daniel Tradition,” 340.

18. The *Epistle of Jeremiah* also reshapes the seventy years of Jer 29, using the familiar chapter as a “jumping off point” (John Goldingay, *Daniel* [WBC 30; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989], 232). In this case, the seventy years become “seven generations” or 280 years. Dividing timespans in terms of generations is also a common practice in biblical chronology (e.g., 1 Kgs 6:1; “480 years” or “12 generations”).

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR DANIEL 9:24A

Most of these texts, as John Goldingay reminds us, “represent a way of thinking that Daniel takes up rather than one it initiates.”¹⁹ It follows that while the logic behind the seventy sevens originates in earlier biblical traditions, the notion of heptadic time representing Israel’s history and life is, in fact, a culturally accessible idea. Many of these scrolls and fragments that are of an apocalyptic milieu see Sabbath-heptadic structures as a viable literary option for broadening, deepening, associating, and “theologizing” time. Practicing numerical symbolism in the ANE was, after all, a common activity meant for “discovering order in environment and experience.”²⁰ Dividing heptadic structures into their chronological parts—constructing a timeline—does not appear to be a primary function of this literature.²¹ It is *this* textual, multivalent world of which Daniel is a part.²²

19. Goldingay, *Daniel*, 232. On the discussion of Danielic dependence or influence in calendrical entries in Qumran, see C. H. Cornhill, “Die siebzig Jahrwochen Daniels,” *Theologische Studien und Skizzen aus Ostpreussen* 2 (1889) 1–32; Barbara Thiering, “The Three and Half Years of Elijah,” *NovT* 23 (1981): 41–55. Many of the apocalyptic texts were amenable to intertexts, allusions and formulaic crossovers (see Matthias Henze, “4 Ezra and 2 Baruch: Literary Composition and Oral Performance in First-Century Apocalyptic Literature,” *JBL* 131 [2012]: 181–200). See also Michael E. Stone, *Features of the Eschatology of IV Ezra* (HSS 35; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 143–45. It is safe to affirm that Daniel is not the lone source and architect of second to first century apocalyptic, to be sure, but neither is the Daniel text a *pastiche* of borrowed apocalyptic thought, devoid of any self-generating claims.

20. Adele Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (JSOTSup 50; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 56.

21. Considering the background of this time-imagery, we can conclude with Goldingay that “none of this background suggests that either the total period of 490 years or its subdivisions are to *be expected necessarily to correspond numerically to chronological periods*. Our attempt to link them with such periods is to be made on the basis of exegetical considerations as these arise from the passage, not of actual chronology” (*Daniel*, 258). Assembling large blocks of time into a meaningful, theological order is an “interest . . . typical of Jewish apocalyptic texts” (Collins, *Cosmology*, 56). Apocalyptic texts demonstrate “minimal interest” in hard chronology as such, but nevertheless show a “familiarity with chronological data” (*ibid.*, 57).

22. We cannot ignore Daniel’s imperial education either—it is worth remembering he is versed “in every branch of wisdom” (1:4), a trait that plays a significant role throughout the book. In the case of 9:24–27, chronography was likely a component of such education and should be considered in light of Daniel’s grooming as a court seer (William Adler, “The Apocalyptic Survey of History Adapted by Christians: Daniel’s Prophecy of 70 Weeks,” in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* [ed. James VanderKam; Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 1996], 204).

With these texts as evidence, we can now return to the theological implications for the seventy sevens in Dan 9:24. First, the number “seventy sevens” bears its own theological weight and should, therefore, garner more attention. Often, the time image seventy sevens is relegated to its constituent parts (vv. 25–27) so that interpreters might better reconstruct such historical flashpoints as the assassination of Onias III, Menelaus’ involvement, or the forced removal of Jason Hyrcanus from the high priesthood (172–71 B.C.).²³ But the textual associations and themes shared by these Qumran scrolls oblige the interpreter to consider deeper and richer levels of theological expression. Hints of Sabbath theology, for example, are not out of the question—this is a consistent theme in Qumran texts.²⁴ Sabbath is a “blessed and holy” span of time (Exod 20:11) that is defined in terms of rest (cf. Dan 12:13).²⁵ As Brevard Childs traces the theme in a section devoted to the Sabbath, he observes how it is “the creative act of God who . . . rested on the seventh day” (Exodus), that which is “grounded in God’s redemption of Israel” (Deuteronomy) and, in addition, a “sign of the covenant” (Exod 31:13, 16–17).²⁶ The grand Sabbath, or “Sabbath of Sabbaths,” is first to the Lord (Exod 31:15; 35:2), then to the people (cf. Lev 16:31; 23:32), and finally to the land (cf. Lev 25:4). Repeated references to Torah in the prayer (Dan 9:3–19) further support these sabbatical elements. Seventy sevens, therefore, may have roots in the Edenic sense of Sabbath rest (cf.

23. Klaus Koch, *Das Buch Daniel* (EdF 144; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 142–43.

24. Qumran interpretation utilizes thematic coherence to pull one text to another (as opposed to *only* intertexts or fragmented quotation). Certain interim-period texts correlate the theme of the “fulfilled” age with various time references, but these are either in terms of “epochs fulfilled” (מלאי קצרים; 4QFlor 19–20) or ages. An unspecified “number” (מספר) is even a rubric for interpreting the times. Still, interpretations within these texts are fragmentary and frequently in conjunction with *an assortment of passages*. In addition, a set, teleological motif or theme is in play just as one might encounter in a synagogue reading or sermon (e.g., Davidic messiah, the path of the wise, and the like).

25. We can differentiate between the Jubilee year and aspects of the Sabbath through positive and negative outcomes. Unlike the Jubilee year, which stands as a positive, rewarding command, the Sabbath is both “boon and bane.” Childs expands this two-fold outcome, saying “although the Sabbath was originally intended to be a positive sign of Israel’s special relation to God, it also proved to be a negative sign of Israel’s failure to regard God’s command (Ezek 20:12)” (Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 71).

26. *Ibid.*, 70.

Gen 2:2, 3), where land *and people* undergo restoration.²⁷ Labeling the seventy sevens a *Sabbath*-heptadic image would not be a stretch.

The second implication: the heptadic structure “seventy sevens” is not primarily a sum of years, but a timespan that traces the journey of the faithful saints (Dan 7:22–27), from Exile (Eden, Egypt, Assyria, etc.) to restoration in *its fullest iteration* (“to end sin . . . bring in everlasting righteousness”). We can approach this point from two angles. First, the exegetical landscape of 9:25–27 changes. Second, interpreting communities are able to stake a very powerful claim on the text of 9:24–27 due to its open-ended notion of time. Addressing the first angle, we find a convention that represents a theological interpretation of regime history or *theo-chronology*, resulting in the actualization of YHWH’s decrees (cf. Dan 9:25–27).²⁸ A precise interpretation of the 7-62-1 week pattern, in light of these theological implications, is too broad a pursuit for this study. But, for our purposes here, it suffices to observe how these timelines appear not to be so constricting that they disavow the eschatological claims of the Qumran and sectarian communities. Note the stylized gradation discussed above—69 weeks + 1 culminating week—and the faceless figure (protagonist/antagonist; Israelite/non-Israelite; one/two people [?]) that, while anchored to a historical context, is crafted to resemble a multitude of “anointed” candidates. To achieve this expression theologically (and exegetically), the interpreter of Daniel does not resort to a calendar, but a *theo-chronology*.

Daniel 9:24a presents the interpreter with a starting point or “a platform from which exegesis is launched rather than a barrier by which creative activity is restrained.”²⁹ Oppressed communities could (and can

27. Winfried Vogel, *The Cultic Motif in the Book of Daniel* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 169. See also Michael Burer, *Divine Sabbath Work* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012). In his study, Burer considers Gen 2:1–3 to be the “central passage” around which divine Sabbath work revolves (29). Connections to Genesis are indirect, but Daniel does use שבעים and not the formal שבתה from Lev 23:15 (cf. 25:8). We may ask: why not use the original word? The time-image may intentionally refer to the skeleton or the boldest outline of the sabbatical institution to make room for new imagery (desolation of the temple, full restoration of land and people, etc.). These emphases, though related, cannot be conflated.

28. Alexandra Grund (*Entstehung*, 40) traces the multiple senses of the “Siebentägige Zeiteinheiten” through Qumran as well as Mesopotamian and Ugaritic backgrounds, solidifying an unbroken usage of the heptadic convention throughout ancient literature and belief-systems in the ANE. The question remains how does this usage permeate Daniel and where does the canonical Daniel depart from standard conventions?

29. Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 83.

[?]) see themselves and their plight reflected in the words of Daniel. It is likely that the canonical shape of Dan 9:24–27 widened its interpretive bounds so as to allow future readers to enter into its text—a dynamic with which the Essene and sectarian communities would have gladly engaged. George Brooke senses this engagement, describing such parabiblical texts surrounding Dan 9 as written from “a special vantage-point,” penned in light of concurrent revelation.³⁰ The decreed plan of God includes these communities and “was not confined to the distant past but continued in their time and fellowship.”³¹ Ultimately, the hope held in common is the end of exile, oppression and sin itself.³²

CONCLUSION: THE SEVENTY SEVENS AS A TIME IMAGE

Generally, when a scholar speaks of a symbolic number in prophetic or apocalyptic discourse, it is simply the opposite of “literal.” But “image” or “symbol,” in this case, is more than that.³³ Numerical images do more than refer.³⁴ In examining a cross-section of select Qumran apocalypses,

30. George Brooke, “Thematic Commentaries on Prophetic Scripture,” in *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran* (ed. Matthias Henze; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 134.

31. Klaus Koch, “Stages in the Canonization of the Book of Daniel,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception, Volume 2* (ed. John Collins and Peter Flint; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 432; VanderKam, “Questions,” 270. Here, VanderKam is commenting on the Teacher of Righteousness and his relationship to *concurrent* revelation (cf. 1QpHab 7.4–5).

32. The end of sin, as Goldingay reminds us, comes at the end of “the seventy Sabbath years that were due” and “have been exacted sevenfold” (*Daniel*, 232).

33. Metaphor is another way to describe the seventy sevens, but qualification is necessary. *Gradients* of metaphor are at work (see David Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics, and Divine Imagery*; RLAJ 4; Leiden: Brill, 2001], 20–29). On the first metaphorical level, the seventy sevens depict a complete unit of time. Further along the continuum of metaphor, the image takes on the nuance of completion by depicting a pattern of Sabbath “weeks.” On another level, the metaphor extends beyond itself into an eschatological vision of Sabbath rest and unrest (9:24b–27). Subscribing to this definition of metaphor does not constrain the interpreter to choose between “real” and “imaginary” persons, places or events.

34. The language is not merely referential, but performative, expressive, and cohesive. Daniel supplies imagery that is able to capture and communicate or to respond to an experience (cf. G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], 92–94). These dynamics surrounding the heptadic phrase are more distinctive when we compare the time images of 9:24–27 to the other numbers in the book: the “2300 evenings and mornings” (8:14) and the “1290–1335 days” (12:11–12) are clearly operating with some precision (André Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel* [trans. David Pellauer; Atlanta: John Knox, 1979], 250).

it is probable that the seventy sevens is not a strict time reference, but a time *image* meant to encapsulate a period of exile-restoration.³⁵ The heptadic image, in particular, communicates numerous layers of significance. Literary conventions such as the seven-year period have ancient roots and anticipate Daniel's own use by centuries.³⁶ Theologically speaking, seventy sevens is broad enough to include the shared themes and convictions of later readerships in Judaism, including—but not limited to—the Sabbath tradition and the promise of full restoration from exile and sin.

35. Ancient texts, such as Ugaritic poems, already use heptadic conventions and images to refer to more than events: "The seven-year convention—or rather, the end of a seven-year period—is a more fixed literary formulation . . . and is meant to point out a change, the end of a cycle, the beginning of the final arrangement: 'for seven years there was such a state of affairs, but in the seventh year finally the situation changed,' or 'for seven years I had to wait, but in the seventh year I decided to act,' and so on" (Mario Liverani, "The Chronology of the Biblical Fairy-Tale," in *The Historian and the Bible: Essays in Honor of Lester Grabbe* [ed. Philip Davies; LHB/OTS 530; New York: T & T Clark, 2010], 77).

36. In Hittite chronology, the reign of a king, Urhi-Teshub, lasted "for six-years" and "on the *seventh* year," the usurper Hattusshia III took the throne. Again, in the autobiographical inscription on a statue of King Idrimi of Alakah, we read, "seven years I resided among the Habian, but in the *seventh* year the god Adad turned toward me." One last example, in the Mari archives (*ARM* I. 131), an officer writes about a siege and reports that "on the seventh day I took the town"—less precise in chronology, but appropriate in terms of motif. Heptads can, therefore, take on a nuance of finishing and not just a point in a sequence.