

The Jesus Myth?



The following notes contain some of the material presented in the series "Is God for Real?"

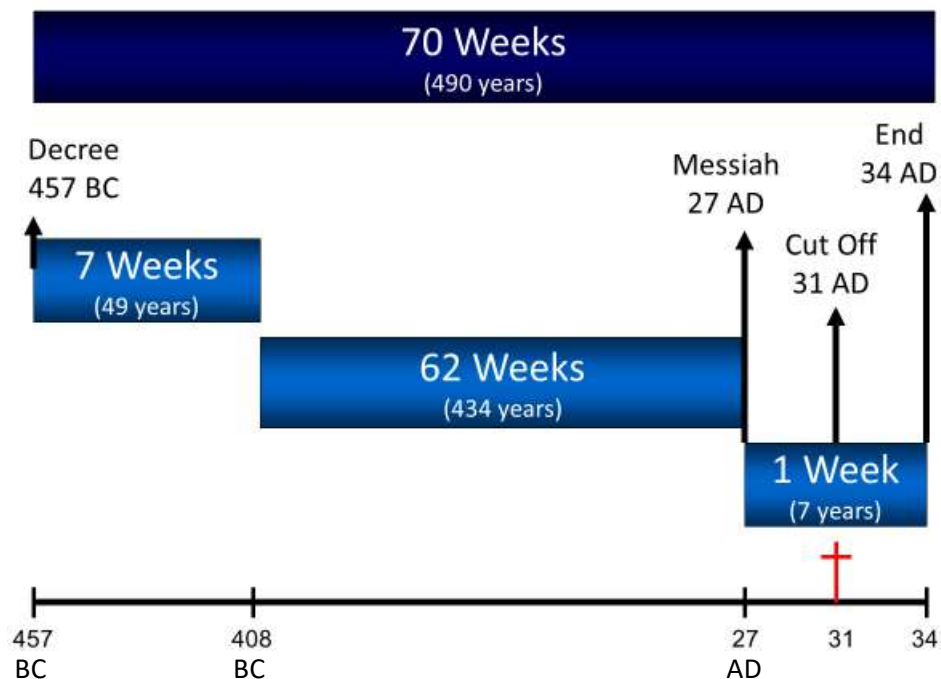
No single person has influenced life on this planet more than Jesus Christ. Just prior to the year 2000, Reynolds Price wrote in Time magazine, "...the single most powerful figure – not merely in these two millennia, but in all human history – has been Jesus of Nazareth" Time, 6.12.99. What justification could he have for making such a claim? To begin with, more than 2.3 billion people on earth claim to be Christians – followers of Jesus Christ. Other religions such as Islam and Judaism regard Him as a prophet. Still others, such as Gandhi in India, have had a high regard for His treatment of others and for His teachings. There have been more books written about Jesus of Nazareth than any other figure in history. The same could be said of songs, pictures and statues.

Every time we write the date we acknowledge the birth of Jesus Christ, as all history is dated from His birth - either BC (before Christ), or AD (Anno Domini, the year of our Lord). In the New Testament Jesus said that He was the central figure in all of the Holy Scriptures (John 5:39), and in the Old Testament there are more than 300 prophecies and allusions of His first coming. Dr Peter Stoner, Former Chairman of the Departments of Mathematics, Astronomy and Engineering at Pasadena College in California, and 600 of his students took just eight of the prophecies about the Messiah and applied the 'Principle of Probability.' What were the chances of these eight prophecies being fulfilled in one person? They concluded that the chance of all eight being fulfilled in one man in one lifetime was 1 in 10 to the power of 17. That is 100,000,000,000,000,000, or 1 in one hundred thousand trillion. Those are pretty small odds!

Perhaps the most remarkable prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah is found in Daniel chapter nine. Certain Jews even attached a curse to this prophecy deterring anyone from trying to interpret it. "May the bones of the hands and the bones of the fingers decay and decompose, of him who turns the pages of the book of Daniel, to find out the time of Daniel 9:24-27, and may his memory rot from off the face of the earth forever." Talmudic Law. p.978, Section 2, Line 28. Daniel chapter 9 begins with Daniel praying to God about his people, the Jews, and about their city, Jerusalem. In Daniel 9:24 the angel Gabriel tells Daniel that 70 weeks are determined, or literally 'cut off' for the Jews and Jerusalem to make an end of sins, and amongst other things to anoint the Most Holy. But did Gabriel mean 70 literal weeks, or is this time prophecy symbolic of something much greater?

Many of the time prophecies of the Bible are written in symbolic form, and many Bible scholars for centuries have recognised the principle of substituting 1 year for each day of a time prophecy. Ezekiel 4:6 and Number 14:34 are examples where this principle has been applied. Jewish scholars writing before the time of Christ recognised this passage as meaning 70 weeks of years. In other words, 70 x 7 or 490 literal years. The prophecy continues in verse 25-27 where the 70 weeks are broken down into 7 weeks, 62 weeks and 1 week. There was to be 7 weeks and 62 weeks from the going forth of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the Messiah the Prince. Think of it! Here is a prophecy that very definitely predicts the appearance of the Messiah! The decree referred to here is described in Ezra 7:7,13 and is given by King Artaxerxes of Persia in 457 BC. So with this as our starting point we move forward in history 69 weeks, or 483 years which brings us to 27 AD. Luke 3:1, 21-22 records that Jesus was baptised in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar, or 27 AD! This is when Jesus began His work as the 'Christ' or 'Messiah,' which both mean 'anointed one' in English.

However, the prophecy doesn't end there. It goes on to say in Daniel 9:26 that after this the Messiah would be 'cut off but not for Himself.' Jesus was indeed 'cut off' from the land of the living, for sinners like you and I. Finally, verse 27 tells us that He, Jesus, would confirm a covenant with many for one week, and that in the midst of that week he would bring an end to sacrifices. Did this happen? Jesus Himself told His disciples that he was making a covenant with them during the Last Supper, when he said, "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins," (Matthew 26:28). Furthermore, three and a half years after His baptism, (or in the midst of the week), Jesus was crucified as the Lamb of God, bringing an end to the sacrificial system that had for centuries pointed to Him as the ultimate sacrifice for sin. The tearing of the curtain in the temple at the time of His crucifixion symbolised the end of that system of sacrifices (Mark 15:38). After His resurrection and ascension to heaven His disciples continued taking the gospel to the Jews for another 3 ½ years, after which Stephen was stoned and ultimately Saul or Paul as he would later be known, would take the gospel to the gentiles. (See Hebrews 2:3).



This prophecy in Daniel chapter 9 is truly one of the most remarkable in scripture. It so accurately identifies Jesus as the Messiah that many sceptics have become believers after studying it. We can have absolute confidence in the fact that Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be, and that He is able to do what He promised to do, which is to forgive us our sins and to give us everlasting life. Would you like to accept Him as your Lord today?

If you would like to know more about this subject, or others in the series, 'Is God for Real?' then please contact one of our staff and they will be happy to help you.