

Two Significant Problems With Harold W. Hoehner's Chronology of the Life of Christ

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Since its introduction in the early nineteen-seventies Harold Hoehner's *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Dallas Theological Seminary 1973, 1974, 1975, and The Zondervan Corporation, 1977) has become a standard reference for many conservative, premillennial students of the Bible. Hoehner's work provides an excellent discussion of the chronological aspects of many important facets of Christ's life and ministry, including: the date of his birth, the commencement of his ministry, the day and year of his crucifixion, and the seventy-weeks prophecy of the Book of Daniel. There are, however, a few problems with Hoehner's chronology that should be noted. In this paper the author addresses two important issues: 1) Hoehner's calculations concerning Daniel's Seventy Weeks, and 2) his conclusion that Christ's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem occurred on a Monday rather than a Sunday.¹

Problems with Hoehner's chronology of Daniel's Seventy Weeks Prophecy

While Dr. Hoehner makes many valuable observations regarding the chronology of Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy, as well as observations on Sir Robert Anderson's prior calculations regarding the prophecy, there are some significant problems with his analysis.

1. The start-date of March 5 (444 B.C.) that Hoehner gives for Nisan 1 (the presumed start-date of the Seventy-Weeks Prophecy) is incorrect; March 5, 444 B.C. fell on II Adar 2, while Nisan 1 fell on April 2.² Likely the reason for this error was a failure to recognize that 445/444 B.C. (year 3317 in the Hebrew Calendar) was a year with an intercalary month. The difference between II Adar 2 and Nisan 1 is 28 days. Thus at the outset, Hoehner's calculation was thrown off by 28 days.

2. Interestingly, Hoehner correctly calculated the number of days in the first sixty-nine weeks as 173,855, but believing the correct number to be 173,880 (since 69 weeks x 7 years/week x 360 days/year equals 173,880 days) he thought the calculation needed a 25-day adjustment.³ Beginning with an incorrect starting date (March 5, 444 B.C.) through a combination of errors he calculated the terminal point of the sixty-ninth week to be

¹ A portion of the discussion presented here can also be found in the author's work, *The Olivet Discourse: A Reconstruction of the Text From Matthew, Mark, and Luke, with Commentary*, Biblical Reader Communications, 2010. pp. 201-207.

² Dates other than Hebrew dates are Julian.

³ He started with a date that was 28 days too early (March 5, instead of April 2), added 25 days to adjust for the difference between 173,855 days and 173,880 days, then made another 4 day error in computation. The result was that his terminal date was +1 day off—March 30 instead of March 29 (cf. Hoehner, page 138).

March 30, A.D. 33.⁴ Had he begun with the correct starting date for Nisan 1 (April 2, not March 5) 444 B.C. and calculated the end-date correctly, recognizing that there are 173,855 days (the number of days in exactly 476 solar years) in the first sixty-nine weeks (not 173,880 days), the terminal date would have computed to March 29, A.D. 33, the very day of the Triumphal Entry of Christ into Jerusalem five days before his crucifixion.⁵ It is critical to recognize that the prophecy calculates correctly when based on whole solar years, i.e., 476 years, not 476.0676744 years.^{6,7}

3. The errors pointed out above in date conversions are easy to identify; however, since Hoehner doesn't show all of his calculations it is impossible to know how some errors were made in calculating the end-date of the first sixty-nine weeks. He seems to imply that from March 5, 444 B.C. to March 5, A.D. 33 was 173,855 days, to which if one added 25 days, they would arrive at an end-date of March 30, A.D. 33, there being 173,880 days in the first sixty-nine weeks (i.e., 7 years/week x 69 weeks x 360 days/week).⁸ However, March 5, 444 B.C. to March 30, A.D. 33 is not 173,880 days, as Hoehner's calculation presumes, but 173,859 days—a full 21 days off.⁹

⁴ This involved multiple errors, for starting from Nisan 1, 444 B.C. and adding 173,880 days gives a terminal date of April 23, A.D. 33, not March 30 as Hoehner indicates. Actually neither of these dates could be the correct terminal date of the first sixty-nine weeks (given Nisan 1, 444 B.C. as the starting date). Starting from Nisan 1, 444 B.C. and adding 173,855 days (the number of days in the first six-nine weeks) gives a terminal date of Nisan 9 (March 29), A.D. 33, which was the date of Christ's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Hoehner's miscalculation of the terminal date as March 30 is likely the reason he believed the Triumphal Entry to have taken place on Monday instead of Sunday (see Hoehner, p. 143). That the Triumphal Entry took place on Sunday is well attested from the Gospel of Mark (see the discussion further along in this paper).

⁵ This is where Hoehner made a critical error; he added the fractional portion of a solar year (0.0676744 solar years being 25 days), which should have been dropped when the 476.0676744 solar years were computed (see the computation further along). By adding the additional 25 days and making another 4-day unspecified error in calculation, he appeared to have a nearly correct date (recall that his starting date was off by 28 days); this left the calculation off by +1 day (Monday, March 30, A.D. 33 instead of the correct date: Sunday, March 29, A.D. 33), which he reconciled by simply moving the Triumphal Entry to Monday rather than Sunday. (While there is no necessity for the sixty-nine weeks to end on the day of the Triumphal Entry, it would seem reasonable that it would end on some significant day.)

⁶ He assumes that 173,855 days plus 25 days (173,880 days) from Nisan 1, 444 B.C. terminated on Nisan 10 (March 30), A.D. 33 when it actually terminated April 23, A.D. 33 (Nisan 1, 444 B.C. is Julian Day Number (JDN) 1,559,344; that date plus 173,880 days is JDN 1,733,224, or April 23, A.D. 33). Of course, April 23, A.D. 33 would overshoot the crucifixion by 17 days and could not be correct.

⁷ Both Anderson and Hoehner assume that Nisan 1 was intended since a specific day in the month is not mentioned in Nehemiah 2:1. The author's calculation also uses Nisan 1 as the start-date. Actually, any start-date between Nisan 1 and Nisan 5 (444 B.C.) would satisfy the requirements of the prophecy that the sixty-nine weeks would terminate prior to the death of Messiah (Dan. 9:25-26).

⁸ Hoehner, p. 138.

⁹ March 5, 444 B.C. is JND 1,559,316; March 30, A.D. 33 is JDN 1,733,175; the difference is 173,859 days (173,880 days – 173,859 days = 21 days).

Dates significant to the Seventy-Weeks Prophecy

Hebrew Calendar	Julian Calendar	Julian Day Number ¹⁰	Significance
Nisan 1, 444 B.C. (Heb. Year 3317)	April 2, 444 B.C.	1,559,344	Artaxerxes' second decree (the presumed starting point for the seventy-weeks prophecy)
Nisan 9, A.D. 33 (Heb. Year 3793)	March 29, A.D. 33	1,733,199	Terminal date of the sixty-ninth week; date of Christ's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

My own calculation of the prophecy is as follows: The prophetic data is given in integers. Although the 7 years/week x 69 weeks x 360 days/year divided by 365.24219 days/solar year equals 476.0676744 solar years (173,880 days), the number of days in the integer result (476 years) is only 173,855 (476 years x 365.24219 days/year). One must bear in mind that although the prophecy is calculated in days for the purpose of determining the end-date of the first sixty-nine weeks, it was given in integer units; thus the solution to the endpoint of the sixty-ninth week is the number of days in the integer number of solar years for the 69 weeks. When calculated this way the result is precisely the number of days between Nisan 1, 444 B.C. (the presumed start-date of the prophecy) and Nisan 9, A.D. 33, the date of Christ's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem and his rejection by the leaders of Israel five days before his crucifixion. The simplest method of calculating the end-date of the sixty-ninth week is to determine the Julian Day Number (JND) of the starting point (Nisan 1, 444 B.C. is JND 1,559,344) add 173,855 days, which gives the JND of the terminal date (1,559,344 + 173,855 = JND 1,733,199), which was Nisan 9 (March 29), A.D. 33 (a Sunday), the date of the Triumphal Entry. When done this way the calculation is simple, precise, and requires no adjustments of any kind, only a recognition that the data was given in whole numbers and the solution lies in advancing from the start-date exactly 476 solar years.¹¹

¹⁰ All Julian Day Numbers (JDN) are 12h UT. (Julian Day Numbers are also referred to as "Serial Day Numbers.")

¹¹ Note that a decimal number was used in this calculation (365.24219 days/solar year). If, as the point has been made, the correct solution must be an integer, one might ask why a decimal number was used in the intermediate computation. The answer is simple: the number of days in a solar year is, for all practical purposes, a natural constant (rather than data); the other numbers (those given in the prophecy or deduced from other prophetic material) are all integer data. It is only the result (i.e., the number of years) that must be an integer. Thus in computing the solution we are allowed to distinguish between constants (which may be decimal numbers) and data (which is only given to a particular level of specificity—in this case integers). The result of a calculation cannot be more specific than the data; in this case the result cannot be more specific than a whole year.

The chronology of the Passion Week

Hoehner's chronology of the first half of the Passion Week (Sunday through Wednesday) also contains a major problem, likely due to the incorrect calculation of the terminal point of Daniel's sixty-ninth week, which Hoehner calculated to be Monday, Nisan 10 (March 30) A.D. 33 instead of the correct date of Sunday, Nisan 9 (March 29). For reasons he does not explain, Hoehner inserts a one day break between John 12:8 and 12:9 where no break is indicated in the biblical text. This mistake places the triumphal entry on Monday instead of Sunday as indicated in Mark's gospel. The insertion of this break is likely due to his wanting the sixty-ninth week of Daniel's prophecy to terminate on a significant day. The effect of this mistake is that all of the events he lists for Sunday through Wednesday are off by one day.

Hoehner's chronology of the Passion Week:

Christ Arrived at Bethany	Saturday, March 28
Crowds at Bethany	Sunday, March 29
The Triumphal Entry	Monday, March 30
Curing of the fig tree / cleansing of the temple	Tuesday, March 31
Final visit to the temple / Olivet Discourse	Wednesday, April 1
Passover meal, betrayal, arrest, trial	Thursday, April 2
Christ tried and crucified	Friday, April 3
Christ's resurrection	Sunday April 5

Hoehner begins the Passion Week with Jesus' arrival at Bethany, which he correctly states was Saturday, March 28; note that Jesus arrived six days before the Friday Passover (Jn. 12:1-11). However, without stating any justification Hoehner begins the next day (Sunday) at John 12:9, where no break is indicated, placing the gathering of Jews in Bethany on Sunday instead of Saturday. This critical error advances the remainder of the week, through Wednesday, by one day. The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem was on the next day (Sunday), not Monday as Hoehner indicates. How do we know this? Jesus was crucified on a Friday (the day before the Sabbath, cf. Mk 15:42 and Lk. 23:54,56), which was also a Passover (Jn. 19:31), and Mark's account indicates the passage of days for this final week. Following the sequence given in Mark's gospel, we find that Christ's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (Mk. 11:1-11) was followed the next day by the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple (Mk. 11:12-19); some of Jesus' teachings, including the Olivet Discourse, occurred the following day (Mk. 11:20-13:37); Jesus' anointing by Mary, and Judas' arrangement to betray him occurred the next day (Mk. 14:1-11); the Passover meal and Jesus' betrayal and arrest occurred the next day (Mk. 14:12-72); the crucifixion occurred the following day – Friday (Mk. 15:1-47). Thus we have an unbroken sequence of the Passion Week in Mark's gospel, from the Triumphal Entry on Sunday to the crucifixion on Friday (Passover). Note the following information from Mark's gospel (11:1-16:8) and John 12:1-11:

Correct Chronology of the Passion Week:

Day	Event	Reference	Sequence of Days
Saturday (March 28, A.D. 33)	Jesus arrived at Bethany and ate a meal with Lazarus and others; he was anointed by Mary; many Jews gathered to see him	Jn. 12:1-11	The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (Jn. 12:12-19) occurred "On the next day..." (Jn. 12:12)
Sunday (March 29)	The Triumphal Entry of Christ into Jerusalem	Mk. 11:1-11	Occurred the day before the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple (Mk. 11:12-19)
Monday (March 30)	The cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple	Mk. 11:12-19	Occurred "...on the next day..." (Mk. 11:12), i.e., the day after the Triumphal Entry; this day ended "whenever [i.e., when] evening came" (Mk. 11:19)
Tuesday (March 31)	The final visit to the temple and the Olivet Discourse	Mk. 11:20-13:37	The account of this day picks up "...as they were passing by in the morning" (Mk. 11:20)
Wednesday (April 1)	Jesus anointed by Mary; Judas arranged Jesus' betrayal	Mk. 14:1-11	"...the Passover and Unleavened Bread was two days off..." (Mk. 14:1)
Thursday (April 2)	Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover meal; Judas' betrayal; Jesus' arrest and night-time trial	Mk. 14:12-72	Occurred "... on the first day of Unleavened Bread when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed..." (Mk. 14:12)
Friday (April 3)	Daytime trial, crucifixion, burial	Mk. 15:1-47	"And early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes, and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away, and delivered Him up to Pilate." (Mk. 15:1)

Saturday (April 4)	In the grave		(Required by the events of Friday and Sunday)
Sunday (April 5)	The resurrection	Mk. 16:1-8	Occurred "...when the Sabbath was over...very early on the first day of the week" (Mk. 16:1-2)

As can be seen from the information above, from the Gospel of Mark it is easy to trace an unbroken sequence of events from Sunday (March 29) to Sunday (April 5); we need add only the information from John 12:1-11 to know that Jesus arrived in Bethany on Saturday (March 28) and ate a meal with Lazarus and others and was anointed by Mary.

It should be borne in mind that Hoehner's calculation of the Seventy-Weeks Prophecy was done at a time when such date calculations were not so straightforward. It also seems likely that Hoehner's incorrect chronology of the Passion Week is linked to his miscalculation of the end-date of the first sixty-nine weeks of Daniel's Seventy-Week Prophecy. Thankfully, with these adjustments Hoehner's work still proves to be an excellent resource for the chronological study of Christ's life.