

THE HEBREW MASCULINE PLURAL FOR "WEEKS" IN THE EXPRESSION "SEVENTY WEEKS" IN DANIEL 9:24

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1. Introduction

The expression "seventy weeks" in Dan 9:24 has been a subject of continuing discussion because of (1) use of the masculine plural form of the noun "weeks" in the Hebrew text of the book of Daniel and (2) the question of whether the resultant meaning is "weeks," "sevens," "besevened,"¹ or "heptad/hebdomad." The terms "heptad" and "hebdomad" are directly related to the rendering in the LXX of the expression "seventy weeks" by the Greek words *hebdomēkonta hebdomades*² and the use of the Latin *hebdomades* in the Vulgate. The influence of this wording of these ancient translations, to which the English "hebdomad/heptad" (respectively, "seven/besevened") is related, is so pervasive that the NIV has given the translation

¹Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973), 247, holds also that *šābuʿīm* means "sevens" but claims that "the form of the word (*šābuʿīm*) is a participle, meaning literally 'besevened,' i.e. made up of seven parts." This is not supported in any lexicon or grammar, and it cannot be accepted as a sound morphological analysis. The masculine noun *šābūʾāʾ* is a noun of the *qatūl* formation (so R. Meyer, *Hebräische Grammatik* [Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1969], 2:58).

²Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta*, 7th ed. (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1962), 2:923 (Theodotion's version has the same wording); and the Vulgate. In addition, see Franz Fraidl, *Die Exegese der Siebzig Wochen Daniels in der alten und mittleren Zeit* (Graz: Leuschner and Lubensky, 1883), 7-11, 24-25, 35-45; and Josephus Linder, *Commentarius in Librum Daniel, Cursus Scripturae Sacrae* 23 (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1939), 370-373.

"seventy sevens," thus departing from the term "weeks" used in previous English versions.³ A number of other recent English versions, while maintaining the rendering "seventy weeks" in the text itself, provide the marginal reading "sevens" as a substitute for "weeks."⁴

The concept of "sevens" or "besevened" has been derived from the interpretation of "weeks" as "hebdomads" or "heptads."⁵ The "heptad" is taken to signify "a period or group of seven of something."⁶ Modern renditions or interpretations that use such terms in place of "weeks" for the time elements in Dan 9:24-27 reveal the influence of backgrounds other than that which is based on the straightforward meaning of the Hebrew word in the text, *šābu'îm*, as "weeks".⁷

³A notable exception to the usual English rendering of the LXX is that of S. Bagster, *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament, with an English Translation* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1879), 1065, who retains the "seventy weeks" rendering of the KJV in his translation of the LXX.

⁴NKJV, MLB, etc. NEB has the traditional "seventy weeks" (so also RSV, NRSV, JB, NJB), but REB has the unconventional expansive rendering "seventy times seven years," with the marginal notation: "*Heb. seventy weeks (of years)*," thus admitting that the rendering in the text itself is periphrastic.

⁵See, e.g., among many commentators, John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 228; E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 195; H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1949), 409; and in the last century particularly Carl F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (reprint ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, n.d.), 338, 339, who, in turn, follows Kranichfeld and Hengstenberg. See also n. 1 above, and n. 7 below.

⁶Goldingay, 228.

⁷Young, 196, argues that the "seventy sevens" are (in the words of Kliefoth, whom he quotes) "an intentionally indefinite designation of a period of time measured by the number seven, which chronological duration must be determined on other grounds." This cannot be followed. I agree with the criticism of Young by Aage Bentzen, *Daniel*, HAT 19 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1952), 66, who notes, "Aber eine unbestimmte Zeitangabe hier anzunehmen, ist vollkommen textwidrig. Das wäre keine Antwort auf Daniels Gebet." Young, 195, also claims that "the form [masculine plural of the word for *sevens*] is really a participle meaning *besevened*, i.e., computed by sevens (so Stuart and H[engstenberg]). . . ." A correct morphological understanding of the origin of the *qatāl*-type noun *šābūa'* and its plural forms shows that this old view, which Young still keeps alive, can no longer be supported. For further pertinent observations concerning definitions and interpretations other than "weeks," see William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 74-79.

This word stands in first position in the Hebrew sentence of Dan 9:24, that is, it stands before the numeral "seventy" (*šib'îm*), seemingly for emphasis. The masculine plural ending *-îm* is not used outside the book of Daniel in the OT as a plural for *šābûa'*, "week." The plural for "weeks" elsewhere in the OT employs the *-ôt* form, the feminine plural termination.⁸

The fact that the plural for *šābûa'* appears in the OT with both feminine and masculine endings leads the careful interpreter to investigate the usage of Hebrew double-gender plurals in nouns. This is a necessary step in ascertaining the significance and meaning, if possible, of the masculine form *šābû'îm*, "weeks," in Dan 9:24-27. Should the Hebrew term be rendered with "sevens" or the like, as is done in the NIV, the margins of other English versions, and numerous commentaries?⁹ Or, should it be translated and interpreted in accord with internal syntactical and structural reasons that are based on the significance of double-gender plurals in biblical Hebrew? The purpose of this article is to pursue these questions.

2. Major Current Interpretations

Modern commentators have noted time and time again that in the OT usage the Hebrew masculine form *šābû'îm* is unique to the book of Daniel.¹⁰ Various reasons have been put forth as to why this phenomenon occurs in Dan 9:24.

James A. Montgomery, in his magisterial Daniel commentary, has made a brief remark to the effect that "the differentiation in pl.

⁸The six plurals with the masculine *-îm* are only found in the book of Daniel (Dan 9:24, 25 [twice], 26; 10:2, 3). The feminine plural ending *-ôt* is found nine times elsewhere in the OT (Exod 34:34 [twice]; Num 28:26; Deut 16:9, 10, 16; Jer 5:24; Ezek 45:21; 2 Chron 8:13). See Solomon Mandelkern, *Veteris Testamenti Concordantiae Hebraicae atque Chaldaicae* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1961), 1143; Avraham Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Bible* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1985), 1103.

⁹See Young, 195-221; Joyce Baldwin, *Daniel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1978), 172-78; Otto Plöger, *Das Buch Daniel*, Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1965), 140, who refers to "siebzig `Siebenheiten'"; and Goldingay, 257-268; plus many others.

¹⁰This is true of all four occurrences of this same plural in Dan 9:24-26. See above, n. 8.

[has the purpose of] being intentional."¹¹ He was far ahead of his time in this recognition, as we shall see below, and I believe that his suggestion is correct. Unfortunately, he did not go on to define the intentionality involved, a matter that therefore calls for continued attention.

Otto Plöger is typical of those who suggest that the masculine plural *šābu'im* may be used to emphasize the idea of "years," with the meaning of "*Siebenheiten* [units of seven]."¹² He too, like Montgomery, does not enter into any further discussion as to the reason for his suggestion.

John Walvoord, one of the best-known dispensationalist interpreters, writes in his commentary on Daniel regarding the term *šābu'im*: "The English word 'weeks' is misleading as the Hebrew is actually the plural of the word for *seven*, without specifying whether it is days, months, or years."¹³ On this basis, Walvoord and others use the rendering "sevens" in place of the time-honored translation "weeks" in Dan 9:24-26.

This rendering of the noun *šābu'im* as "sevens" is not, however, supported by the best etymological and philological research. Johann J. Stamm points out that the term *šābūa'*, the singular from which both the feminine plural *šābu'ôt* and the masculine plural *šābu'im* are derived, is "a primary noun which is formed on the basis of the *qatûl* formation, belonging to the word group *šeba'/šib'ah*."¹⁴ For Dan 9:24 he provides the meaning "70 weeks," and he also maintains the rendering "weeks" for each of the subdivisions mentioned in Dan 9:24-26.¹⁵

Some etymological considerations used since the nineteenth century for the interpretation of the term *šābu'im* are vital: (a) The word for "weeks" is a "primary noun" which is formed on the basis of a regular noun formation of the *qatûl* type, as H. Bauer and P. Leander noted long ago, and which is also affirmed by the

¹¹James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927), 376.

¹²Plöger, 134.

¹³John Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 219.

¹⁴Johann J. Stamm, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), 1287.

¹⁵Ibid., 1288: "7 Wochen [Dan] 9₂₅, 62 Wochen [Dan] 9_{25/4} 70 Wochen [Dan] 9₂₄."

Hebrew grammar of Rudolf Meyer.¹⁶ (b) It is a fact of Hebrew grammar that the term *šābu'im* is not a plural of the word for "seven." The plural for "seven" (*šeba'*) is *šib'im*, not *šābu'im*.¹⁷ (c) There is no direct or indirect etymological derivation of the word "weeks" from the cardinal numeral "seven," as was surmised long ago at a time when the study of the Hebrew language was not yet far advanced. There seems to be a family of words related to the trilateral root *šb'* from which different "primary nouns" derive.¹⁸ Each "primary noun" is developed on the basis of its own noun-formation pattern, and each functions with its own meaning independently of the meaning of the other "primary nouns."

André Lacocque, noting the change in gender from the usual feminine plural in the OT to the masculine form in Dan 9:24, states, "In the given form, there is a word play with the following term."¹⁹ This word-play hypothesis is not an entirely novel suggestion.²⁰ Lacocque's explanation would possibly suffice if v. 24 were the only instance in Dan 9:24-27 in which the masculine plural form *šābu'im* is used. In v. 25, however, we find the second occurrence of the same plural in the next expression of time, *šābu'im šib'āh*, "seven weeks."²¹ Thus the same masculine form appears here too in the plural and in the first position. And again it means "weeks," but in this case it does so without a word-play.²² The fact is that in this case there is the so-called "chiastic concord" of normal Hebrew

¹⁶H. Bauer and P. Leander, *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testaments* (reprint ed. [first printing, 1922]; Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1962), 539 §68i; Rudolf Meyer, *Hebräische Grammatik* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1966-), 2:58.

¹⁷Cf. Stamm, 1301.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 1287, 1301.

¹⁹André Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1979), 188.

²⁰According to E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament* (reprint ed.; MacDill AFB, FL: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), 2:807, this suggestion was made in the last century by L. Berthold, *Daniel* (Erlangen: Palm, 1806), and C. von Lengerke, *Das Buch Daniel* (Königsberg: Bornträger, 1835).

²¹The same plural form *šābu'im* actually occurs twice in v. 25; see n. 8, above.

²²When a cardinal number between 3 and 10 is used in the feminine gender, as is the case here, the noun is in the masculine regardless of whether the numeral is used in the absolute in apposition when it precedes the numeral, or in the construct. This normal rule is followed in this instance, indicating that the syntax here follows normal usage. Cf. C. L. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1987), 203.

syntax, a fact that hampers the force of the word-play hypothesis.²³ It appears, therefore, that the word-play interpretation does not adequately account for the differentiation of gender in the noun for "weeks" in Dan 9:24.

Alexander A. Di Lella claims that the plural form "is no doubt caused by a merely mechanical rendering in Hebrew of the Aramaic plural *šabbu'în*. . . ."²⁴ But he does not further support this suggestion. Along with a number of other scholars, Di Lella believes that the Hebrew sections of the book of Daniel (Dan 1:1-2:4a and 8:1-12:13) are translations of an Aramaic original.²⁵ This hypothesis is, however, far from being universally accepted.²⁶ The hypothetical nature of the original language of Dan 9 and the problems related thereto will caution the careful investigator of the Hebrew text of Daniel to refrain from this sort of explanation when there are other available options that are more natural to the Hebrew language itself.

3. Qumran Usage

It should be noted at this juncture that the masculine plural form *šābu'im*, with the meaning "weeks" and not "sevens," has been discovered in the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls.²⁷ Elisha Qimron notes that the masculine plural form *šbw'yhm* appears in the *Manual of Discipline* (1QS) 10:7, 8, alongside the feminine plural

²³Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 277, explain the "chiastic concord" of gender by saying that "cardinal substantives 'three-ten' do not simply agree with the noun enumerated but, following a rule of opposition, have the morphological gender contrary to that noun."

²⁴Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel*, AB 23 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 244. Cf. Goldingay, 229.

²⁵See Hartman and Di Lella, 10, 11; Lacocque, 13, 14; Klaus Koch et al., *Das Buch Daniel* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 55-76.

²⁶A good case in point is the commentary by Goldingay referred to above; see n. 5.

²⁷The large number of Qumran fragments of manuscripts from the book of Daniel which are now all published, together with the close proximity of the oldest texts to the alleged second-century date for the final product of the book, may cause additional problems for the translation hypothesis. See Gerhard F. Hasel, "New Light on the Book of Daniel from the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Archaeology and Biblical Research* 5/2 (1992): 45-53.

form *šbw^cwt*.²⁸ He also points out that "the masculine plural suffix *-îm* (*-y* in construct) is sometimes added to feminine [singular] nouns. . . ."²⁹ In any case, this use of both masculine and feminine plural terminations in Qumran texts as well as in the OT indicates that the Hebrew noun for "weeks" existed in both of the plural-gender forms in postbiblical Hebrew as well as in biblical Hebrew. This Hebrew usage from Qumran is thus a supporting basis in our pursuit of the meaning of double-gender plurals. Our next step is to investigate some pertinent aspects of such nouns.

4. Hebrew Double-Gender Plurals and Dan 9:24

The present understanding of gender usage in the Hebrew language has undergone significant changes based on research in recent years.³⁰ It had been assumed previously—and still is supposed by some scholars—that the gender distinction of the plurals in double-gender nouns points merely to an earlier stage when gender distinctions had not yet been made. Recent research has found this explanation to be unsatisfactory and misdirected.

It has to be affirmed, as stated by Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, that "one must carefully distinguish between gender and gender ending."³¹ The latter has little to do with the former. Diethelm Michel's detailed study of gender in Hebrew syntax has paid attention to this distinction between gender and gender ending.³² Michel indicates that when a language forms two different endings, one has to suppose that there was intent to express different things

²⁸Elisha Qimron, *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Harvard Semitic Studies 29 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1986), 67. It is also worth noting that G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1966), 89, translates as follows: "the seasons of years to their weeks (of years) (=šbw^cyhm)—and at the beginning of their weeks (=šbw^cyhm)." Also, it is noteworthy that the *Damascus Document* 16:4 has *šbw^cwtyhm*, a feminine plural with suffix. Cf. E. Lohse, *Die Texte aus Qumran. Hebräisch und Deutsch* (2d ed.; München: Kösel, 1971), 98, 99.

²⁹Qimron, 67.

³⁰An extensive discussion is provided by Waltke and O'Connor, 95-110.

³¹Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, "Subsidia Biblica 14/1" (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991), 1:266 (bold emphasis is theirs).

³²Diethelm Michel, *Grundlegung einer hebräischen Syntax: Teil 1, Sprachwissenschaftliche Methodik, Genus und Numerus des Nomens* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977), 25-31.

by them.³³ It is true that "certain parts of speech agree with other parts of speech," i.e., there is often gender accident.³⁴ But this is not the case in Hebrew with masculine numerals, where "the masculine form [of the cardinal] is always used with the feminine noun."³⁵

Bruce Waltke and M. O'Connor set forth the same idea by noting that "the feminine formative is used to form numbers used with masculine nouns."³⁶ However, "some inanimate nouns show two genders. . . ."³⁷ This latter point has a direct bearing on the discussion of the masculine plural form *šāḇu'îm* in Dan 9:24.

The noun *šāḇûa'*, "week," considered to be masculine in the singular,³⁸ belongs to inanimate nouns that show two genders in the plural. The plural form of *šāḇûa'* in Dan 9:24, i.e. *šāḇu'îm*, belongs to the group of abstract nouns which often occur in the feminine plural, as well. In addition, the rule that the masculine cardinal "seventy" (*šib'îm*) is used with either masculine or feminine nouns in apposition is not followed in Dan 9:24, since "chiastic concord" does not go beyond the number ten.³⁹ Does the observation that inanimate nouns may show two gender endings in the plural apply in this case? As Waltke and O'Connor point out, "some non-animate nouns have both masculine and feminine forms" in the singular.⁴⁰ It is not entirely certain whether double gender is present also in the case of the singular *šāḇûa'*.⁴¹

³³Ibid., 45.

³⁴Ibid., 101.

³⁵Seow, 203.

³⁶Waltke and O'Connor, 101.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 988.

³⁹In Hebrew syntax a noun is in apposition to the cardinal numeral if it stands in first position, as is the case here with the term "weeks."

⁴⁰Waltke and O'Connor, 106.

⁴¹It is possible to consider the singular form to be a "gender doublet" (Waltke and O'Connor, 106), because it cannot be determined in two instances in the book of Daniel whether it is used in the masculine or feminine.

We now turn our attention to double-gender plural nouns that have received careful examination by recent grammarians.⁴² It has become rather certain that such plurals are not employed in an arbitrary fashion, but that they serve particular and specific purposes. It is typical of nouns with plural endings in *-îm* and *-ôt* that the "plural of *-îm* is to be understood as a plural of quantity or a plural of groups, whereas *-ôt* indicates an entity or grouping which is made up of individual parts."⁴³ I hold that this is true of *šābûâ*,⁴⁴ just as it is known to be true concerning other nouns.⁴⁴

W. G. E. Watson has shown in his study of gender-matched parallelism (where nouns may be arranged by gender, *like* with *like*) that a global picture is in view in such cases as well.⁴⁵ While we do not seem to have gender-matched parallelism in Dan 9:24, Watson's insight that a gender-matched arrangement suggests a global picture affirms from still another angle our conclusion concerning the special use of plural endings in double-gender nouns. It seems that the use of the masculine plural for "weeks" in Dan 9:24 is a kind of gender-matching with the masculine cardinal numeral "seventy," not for the sake of word-play, but for the sake of indicating that the ending *-îm* emphasizes the global and unitary aspect of the time element "seventy weeks." Thus, the masculine plural ending in the noun *šābûîm* places stress on the totality and entirety of the "seventy weeks" as a unitary whole, whereas the feminine ending *-ôt*, if it had been used, would have stressed the individual parts—i.e., the individual weeks—of the "seventy weeks."

We next pursue this kind of evidence more specifically with regard to the masculine plural *šābûîm* in Dan 9:24. Even the classical Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley grammar noted long ago that "sometimes usage makes a distinction between the two plural forms of the same word."⁴⁶ Another research grammar, recently revised and updated, supports this idea: "Some nouns have both

⁴²It may suffice to point to E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, eds., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (2d ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1946), 242-244; and Meyer, 2:40-42. Of particular importance is Michel, 34-63, who provides numerous examples.

⁴³Michel, 45.

⁴⁴See particularly the analysis of Michel, 34-39.

⁴⁵W. G. E. Watson, "Gender-Matched Synonymous Parallelism in the Old Testament," *JBL* 99 (1980): 321-41.

⁴⁶Kautzsch and Cowley, 243 § 87n.

plural endings; but often only one is used frequently, the other being reserved for special or poetic usage.⁴⁷ By following this lead "of special or poetic usage" in conjunction with Michel's detailed recent studies of double-gender plural nouns in Hebrew, it may be suggested that there is also "a distinction between the two plural forms" of the word *šābûa*'.⁴⁸ And we may conclude that this word's masculine plural form as used in Dan 9:24-27, which is the more rare form, has a special meaning, just as is the case with other nouns that use double-gender plural forms.

Various examples of this phenomenon are cited in representative reference works. We can here take note of but two from among several that are called to attention by Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka. The noun *šādeh*, "field," when it has the feminine plural ending, means "individual fields, individual farms;" with the masculine plural *šādîm*, on the other hand, it means comprehensively, and in a unitary sense, "fields, countryside."⁴⁹ Thus, the masculine plural ending expresses the idea of a general unit. This is what Michel calls a *Gruppenplural*, that is, a plural ending which expresses the idea of the group as a totality, with no concern for the individual parts of which the group is constituted.⁵⁰ When there is to be an emphasis on the individual parts of an entity or group, then the feminine plural ending is employed.⁵¹

The noun *šūmmāh*, "sheaf," is used with the masculine plural ending in Gen 37:7a "for *sheaves* in general . . . [and in the feminine plural] for *individual sheaves* [v.] 7b and Ps 126.6."⁵² Again, the masculine plural is employed to emphasize what is general and non-individual—the totality, fullness, wholeness, entirety.

It may be illuminating to look at another time expression used in the book of Daniel and elsewhere in the OT. The feminine singular *šānāh*, "year," has 134 plurals with the *-îm* ending and

⁴⁷Joüon and Muraoka, 1:271.

⁴⁸L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), 940; Stamm, 1288, gives two major meanings: "sieben zusammenhängende Tage, Woche" and "Jahrsiebt, Jahreswoche."

⁴⁹Joüon and Muraoka, 1:272. Brown, Driver and Briggs, 960, assign a masculine to this noun in the singular. Cf. also Stamm, 1219; and Michel, 40, 41.

⁵⁰Michel, 41.

⁵¹Michel, 40-59, provides numerous examples.

⁵²Joüon and Muraoka, 1:272. See also Koehler and Baumgartner, 55; and Stamm, 56.

nineteen with the *-ôt* ending.⁵³ A customary way of explaining this differentiation in the plurals is to suggest that the feminine occurrences are in poetic texts. However, this interpretation is invalid, for the masculine plural is also used in poetic texts (Ps 90:4, 9; with the feminine in vv. 10, 15; Job 10:5, 16:22).⁵⁴ The feminine plural can hardly be perceived as simply an alternative form of the plural, "but it is used in a way analogous to the other plurals with *-ôt* in expressions wherein the total is perceived as being made up of individual years, while the plural with *-îm* summarizes the years as a group."⁵⁵

This insight on the distinction of endings for the noun "years" sheds important light on the meaning of the "seventy years" in Dan 9:2 (an expression taken from Jer 25:11,12). Here the feminine singular for "years" is employed. It is a collective singular, stressing that the expression "seventy years" is to be conceived of as a time period in totality. In other words, the collective singular places stress, not on the individual years of which the "seventy-years" period is made up, but on this entire time span as *one* single, unitary, and complete entity of prophetic time.

This prophetic-time element of an unbroken totality of "seventy years" serves as a model or backdrop for the "seventy weeks" later in the chapter, where the noun for "weeks" has a masculine plural ending that also emphasizes totality. This masculine plural ending for "weeks" in Dan 9:24 is, as we have already suggested, purposeful and by design so as to stress the unitary whole, the totality, and the completeness of the "seventy weeks," in contrast to the individual parts. In short, the noun *šābūa'* belongs to a classification of double-gender nouns—i.e., masculine words with the singular *-o* ending, and plurals *-îm* and *-ôt*⁵⁶—whose masculine plural ending points to a conscious and specific intent to portray a unitary whole.

The fact that the masculine plural form *šābū'im* stresses the idea of the sum totality of the "seventy weeks" in Dan 9:24 provides a basis for explaining the fact that the verb associated with this expression (the *Niphal* form *nehtak*) is in the masculine singular form. One normally expects congruence/accidence in

⁵³Mandelkern, 1215-1217.

⁵⁴For the extensive discussion of these occurrences, see Michel, 43-45.

⁵⁵Ibid., 45.

⁵⁶See *ibid.*, 36, 37.

number as well as in gender between a noun and its verb. In this case there is congruence or accident only in gender, both the noun and verb being masculine. Since the verb is singular and the noun is plural, congruence in number is lacking. The subject "weeks" is properly in the plural form from a syntactical point of view, but why does the verb have the singular form?

Montgomery suggested that the verb here is in the singular because the "pl. subj. [weeks] . . . itself represents a single idea . . . or possibly the subj. is to be treated as acc. to the pass. . . ." ⁵⁷ John E. Goldingay gave priority to the second possibility, stating that the singular of the verb "implies 'there has been determined/ God has determined . . . ' or perhaps '[a period of] seventy sevens has been determined' . . ." ⁵⁸

In contrast to Goldingay, I would give priority to Montgomery's first option. I believe that the analysis of the meaning and nature of the plural ending, as presented above, reveals the grammatical-syntactical basis for the use of the verb in the singular. That basis is, as we have seen, the fact that the masculine plural form *šābu'îm* stands with the numeral "seventy" for an entity of time in its totality, completeness, and unity—that is, it expresses the "seventy weeks" as being a *single unit* of prophetic time. The verb in the singular simply provides further substantiation for this conclusion. The type of usage that is represented is familiar in Hebrew syntax. ⁵⁹

Indeed, this sound grammatical-syntactical reason for the use in Dan 9:24 of a singular verb with a plural noun having the masculine ending explains what otherwise would seem to be an anomaly, but is really nothing of the sort. The construction exemplifies and supports Karl Marti's view that "the singular [verb] after the plural subject considers the seventy weeks as a unitary concept of time." ⁶⁰

It follows, moreover, that the unitary block of "seventy weeks" cannot be split apart in such a way as to separate the final "one week" (v. 27) from the remainder of the seventy-week period by means of any intervening time period, gap, or parenthesis. Doing

⁵⁷Montgomery, 376.

⁵⁸Goldingay, 229.

⁵⁹See Kautzsch and Cowley, 463 §145h.

⁶⁰Karl Marti, *Das Buch Daniel*, Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament (Tübingen/Leipzig: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1901), 68.

so would destroy the force of both the masculine plural ending for "weeks" and the singular verb form.⁶¹ All three of the sub-units of the "seventy weeks" mentioned in vv. 25-27 function *within* that "seventy-week" time span; none can go beyond it in any manner. According to the text, this period in its entirety is "cut off" for the people of Israel and the holy city.⁶²

5. Conclusion

In harmony with the general, non-individual, unitary, and wholistic emphasis manifested by the use of the masculine plural ending in double-gender nouns, it may be concluded that the masculine plural form *šābu'im* in Dan 9:24 is employed to emphasize the sum total of the "seventy weeks" as a complete and uninterrupted span of time. It stands in sharp contrast to an emphasis on the individual "seventy" single weeks (an emphasis that would have been conveyed by using a feminine plural ending).

Furthermore, by having the masculine plural ending, *šābu'im* is to be rendered as "weeks," and nothing else. Such renderings as "heptad," "hebdomad," "sevens," or "besevened" remove from this noun the specificity expressed by the sum total of "weeks." In fact, there is no grammatical, syntactical, or etymological basis on which the Hebrew language can here, in Dan 9:24-26, depart from the normal meaning of "weeks" that is exemplified in the rest of the OT.

Moreover, the use of *šābu'im* is *intentional* for the purpose of pointing to the totality and unitary nature of the time period. This totality and unitary nature is also indicated by the use of a singular verb. Other suggestions—such as, word-play, an Aramaism, or a late-Hebrew variation—which some scholars have made in

⁶¹Regarding commentators who favor a symbolic interpretation wherein each sub-unit of the "seventy weeks," as well as the entire time period, is separated from actual time, see Gerhard F. Hasel, "Interpretations of the Chronology of the Seventy Weeks," *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*, ed. Frank Holbrook (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assoc., 1986), 3-63. The theory of a "gap" between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks is set forth by J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1969), 246-49, and many other dispensationalist expositors. The term "parenthesis" is used for this gap by Walvoord, 231-37.

⁶²Marti, 68, points out that the verb used "actually means *to be cut off*."

attempting to explain the use of the plural ending in *šābu'im* are now found to be indefensible.

Furthermore, on the basis of Hebrew grammar and syntax and the specific usage of the masculine plural ending of the double-gender noun under discussion, it is a given that the period of "seventy weeks" is limited in chronological time and cannot be stretched into something indefinite in historical time. It is inappropriate from the linguistic and syntactical point of view to separate the sum total of the "seventy-week" period of time into sixty-nine weeks that are continuous and a last week that is separated from them by a "gap," "parenthesis," or some other time element which places the seventieth week in the future.

In conclusion, on the basis of our observations concerning the grammar, syntax, and function of the Hebrew language as manifested in double-gender nouns, we have a better grasp of the true intentionality of the "seventy weeks" as signifying an uninterrupted chronological time unit whose sum total is determined by God and is to be "cut off" for the people of Israel and the holy city. This period of time stands for 490 years of historical time, as has been the consensus of interpreters for centuries. Indeed, the clarification of the masculine form of the noun for "weeks," as based on Hebrew syntax, should remove much speculation and misinterpretation of this prophetic time period of Dan 9:24, putting an understanding of it on a solid grammatical-syntactical footing—a footing without which no good exegesis can function.