

Many have suggested beginning the 69 weeks at the incident described in Nehemiah 2. They speak of this as "a decree to rebuild the city," though, as Keil points out, there is no evidence that Artaxerxes gave a decree at that time.<sup>2</sup> No such word as "decree" or "command" occurs in connection with it. As described in the Scripture it appears to be only an expression of a king's favor toward a servant whom he liked, giving him permission to travel to the city where his ancestors had lived and make some repairs there.

If Artaxerxes had actually issued a decree that the city be rebuilt, there would have been no need for Nehemiah to make a nocturnal examination of the broken walls (Neh. 2:11-16) or to do his rebuilding under constant threat of attack (Neh. 4:11-23). Merely to show the king's officers such a decree would have guaranteed protection while carrying it out. Officials who had assisted Ezra in executing the decree made by Artaxerxes twelve years earlier would certainly have given equal support to Nehemiah if he had been able to show them an actual decree.

In spite of these problems many interpreters insist on taking this alleged decree as a starting point. When they do so they face a different sort of chronological difficulty, since a period of 483 years, starting in 445 B.C., would reach a time several years later than any possible date for the resurrection. Yet some have not only declared that 69 weeks can be taken as reaching to the time of Christ from the date of Artaxerxes' permission to Nehemiah; some have even said that the 69 weeks point to the very day of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem shortly before the crucifixion. They do this by asserting that the 483 years are not to be taken as solar or Julian years, but as "prophetic years."

This idea seems to have originated with Sir Robert Anderson of Scotland Yard in London, England. Anderson's book, The Coming Prince, was first