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## **THE USE OF THE PRONOUN "HE"**

It is natural for us to read the Bible from our own English language perspective. In most cases that is not a problem. However, occasionally we may encounter the **third person pronoun** in an Old Testament passage, and **apply this pronoun to the wrong people**. The reason some people in such situations occasionally apply various forms of the pronouns "he" and "they" to the wrong people is because they apply these pronouns based on English rules of grammar.

However, Hebrew is a vastly different language than English. And in some instances the application of English grammatical rules conveys a wrong meaning for the original Hebrew text.

In this article we'll examine a number of Scriptures where in some cases some individuals, including Bible commentators, tend to apply the third person pronouns to the wrong people, while in some other cases it is patently obvious that this pronoun cannot possibly apply to the antecedent, and in those cases everybody understands this correctly. But first let's consider some general background.

### **SOME LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES**

English is a **syntactic language**, which means that in English **the functions of words depend on their positions within a sentence**. The word order is extremely important for the purpose of establishing the correct meaning. One common rule of a strictly syntactic language is that a third person pronoun always refers to its antecedent. In plain language: in English the pronouns "he" and "they" always refer to the last person or group of persons mentioned. Applying "he" to anyone other than the last person mentioned is not really the thing to do in English; it could easily lead to confusion and ambiguity.

This is based on the above syntactic premise that the functions of words depend on their positions in a sentence. In many cases changing the order of certain words in a sentence can completely change the meaning of that sentence.

That is how the English language functions. And so in English we need to apply forms of the pronouns "he" and "they" very consistently to their antecedents.

**But that is not how the Hebrew language functions.**

Hebrew, Latin and Greek are NOT syntactic languages. While generally speaking they employ a very similar word order in their sentence constructions when compared to the English language, the meaning of such sentences in these languages is not so much dependent on the word order as it is on the endings that are attached to words in these languages.

Thus Hebrew and Greek and Latin are referred to as **inflective languages**. The functions of words are indicated by the endings that are attached to the words. In Greek and in Latin this process of attaching specific endings to nouns and to adjectives is governed by the rules of declension. The Hebrew language has its own set of rules that govern the prefixes and suffixes that are attached to words for the purpose of conveying very specific meanings. And this feature makes the actual word order within a sentence less important in the endeavor to convey a precise meaning.

But in English we don't decline our nouns and adjectives to convey specific meanings. Instead we employ prepositions together with positioning within a sentence to achieve the same result.

Some other languages, like German, fall between these two extremes. Thus German is basically a syntactic language, but it also makes use of a number of features found in inflective languages, by employing a limited number of different endings for certain words to convey different meanings.

Here is a simple illustration in German which does not require you to know any German. While German is not relevant to our discussion, it is easier to follow an illustration of this concept which is foreign to the English language in German than it is to follow such an illustration in Hebrew.

So consider this simple example:

1) The German sentence "**der Hund beisst die Katze**" means "the dog bites the cat", where all five German words are literally translated by the five English words in the above translation.

2) Now let's reverse that word order. The German sentence "**die Katze beisst der Hund**" ALSO MEANS "the dog bites the cat". The change in word order has not changed the meaning of this German language sentence.

3) While this second sentence is not the normal word order German speakers would generally employ, it might be written this way in poetry. Now an English speaker who is unfamiliar with German and who then looks up the German words for this second sentence in a dictionary would find the following: die Katze = the cat; beisst = bites; der Hund = the dog. Thus an English speaker might erroneously conclude that this second sentence means "the cat bites the dog". But that would be wrong. To achieve a correct translation of this second sentence into English, we would have to change the English word order to read: "**the cat the dog bites**", a construction a poet might use, though it is clumsy at best. This change in word order is **a syntactic change**.

4) Looking at the second German sentence: to retain the same word order and achieve the meaning of "**the cat bites the dog**" the German sentence must read: "**die Katze beisst den Hund**". Look carefully: one single letter in the definite article before "Hund" has been changed (i.e. the word "**der**" has been changed to "**den**"), and the meaning of the whole sentence has been reversed.

5) Thus in the above German sentence, if it reads "die Katze beisst der Hund", then it is the dog that bites the cat. But if it reads "die Katze beisst den Hund", then it is the cat that bites the dog. This change in the ending of one word to achieve a completely different meaning is **an inflective change**.

I have presented the above illustration purely for one reason: it should illustrate very clearly that in an inflective language the word order is frequently only of secondary importance. This is a feature with which we English speakers don't intuitively identify; it is a bit strange to our way of thinking.

So the point I wish to make is that **in Hebrew**, an inflective language, in many cases the order of the words in a sentence is not that important, because the prefixes and suffixes attached to those words effectively convey the desired meanings, largely independently of their positioning.

Thus when we translate Hebrew into English, we are not just translating a set of words from one language into another language; we are also **translating from a WAY of thinking that is inherently foreign to us into OUR WAY of thinking**. Language experts and translators are obviously aware of these things, and thus they will in many cases spontaneously change the order of the words when they translate a Hebrew text into English. But most of us "amateur translators", who depend totally on the Strong's numbering system in our efforts to establish the correct meaning for a Hebrew text that has

been translated into English, can easily overlook this point and therefore occasionally be misled.

So here is the sum of the matter in our particular context:

In English forms of the pronouns "he" and "they" should only be used in reference to a direct antecedent. Any other use would create ambiguity. But in Hebrew it is not really important for the pronouns "he" and "they" to always have to refer to a direct antecedent.

In addition, in Hebrew these pronouns are commonly included in the form of the verb without being written as separate words.

In Hebrew the third person pronoun may also be used to refer to individuals who are syntactically twice removed from these pronouns. And if in the Hebrew text these pronouns are twice removed from the people they refer to, then this will be apparent in any interlinear translation of the Old Testament, a translation which presents the Hebrew text with the correct literal English translations printed below each Hebrew word.

Now in the vast majority of cases even in the Hebrew text the pronoun "he", whether it is included as a part of the verb, or whether it is included as a distinct word in the text, does indeed refer to its antecedent. However, there are also hundreds of occurrences where it does not refer to the antecedent.

The examples below are based almost totally on a study of the Book of Genesis I did a few years ago, together with a few other examples from elsewhere, which I came across while looking at certain cross references in my study of the Book of Genesis. The point is that a careful examination of the whole Old Testament would undoubtedly reveal many other examples where the third person pronoun in the Hebrew text does not apply to its strict antecedent, but where the correct meaning is nonetheless obvious.

And after considering the following examples you yourself may notice additional examples when you come across them in your own future readings of Old Testament passages. This is also one of those cases where we only see the things we are looking for.

## **SOME EXAMPLES**

Let's start with some examples where the pronoun "he" obviously does not apply to the antecedent. And this is generally understood by all. But because this is so readily understood in these verses, it is easy for us to not even notice that it is in fact contrary to English grammatical usage.

### **GENESIS 4:9-10**

And the LORD said unto Cain, Where *is* Abel thy brother? **And he said**, I know not: *Am* I my brother's keeper? **And he said**, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. (Genesis 4:9-10)

In Hebrew the verb form for "and he said" is commonly used to introduce a new speaker. So in Hebrew a lengthy conversation between two people could be correctly conveyed by multiple uses of the word "and he said" without necessarily losing track of who is speaking. In English we might achieve a similar degree of clarity by instead of just writing "and he said" using expressions like "and he replied" or "and he responded" or simply by adding the word "then" as in "and then he said".

So in Hebrew a repeated use of "and he said" usually does not really create any confusion as to who is doing the speaking. But in English the simple expression "and he said" used repeatedly could cause some confusion; that's why we have words that allow us to be more specific in such statements (i.e. we can say "he replied" or "he responded").

Now in the above Scripture it is obvious that "**and he said**" at the start of verse 10 **refers to God** speaking! But this obviousness in our English translation is not based on an understanding of grammar! No, in the above translation it is only obviously God speaking because of what follows. The following words unequivocally identify God as the speaker. Now IF the words in verse 10 were to read: "**and he said, I have not seen him since this morning**", THEN it would be equally apparent that Cain was the speaker. To achieve such a meaning without ambiguity in English we might add the word "furthermore", as in "and furthermore he said, I have not seen him since this morning".

Now there is no ambiguity at all in the Hebrew text. However, by our English translation of verse 10 restricting itself to the words "and he said" instead of saying something like "and he responded" or "and he replied", which would indicate a change in speaker, we cannot rely solely on our understanding of English grammar to understand this text correctly. We really have to also examine the words that follow, and those words make clear that God is the One who is speaking.

The point is: With our English language translation our correct understanding of who is referred to with the pronoun "he" at the start of verse 10 has nothing whatsoever to do with any grammatical rules that govern the use of the pronoun "he". Our correct understanding of who is doing the speaking in verse 10 is based exclusively on correctly understanding the implications of the words that follow.

So right here, very early in the Book of Genesis, we already see that the Hebrew text does not really abide by our English language requirement that the pronoun "he" must refer to its antecedent. Let's continue.

### **GENESIS 14:10-11**

And the vale of Siddim *was full of slimepits*; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain. **And they took** all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way. (Genesis 14:10-11)

This is another obvious example where the pronoun "they" does not refer to the antecedent. The antecedent for "they" here is "the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah". And reading this text according to our English language grammatical rules would imply that the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah "took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah". But that is obviously wrong. The meaning here is very clearly that the four invaders listed in verse 9 (i.e. Chedorlaomer and Tidal and Amraphel and Arioch) are spoken about in the expression "and they took".

Again, the meaning here is obvious, even though it is a violation of our English language grammar rules. This is an example of where the pronoun "they" is twice removed from the people it refers to. Hebrew does not abide by English grammar rules.

### **GENESIS 29:3**

And thither were all the flocks gathered: and **they rolled the stone** from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again upon the well's mouth in his place. (Genesis 29:3)

This requires no commentary. Obviously "the flocks" did not roll the stone away from the well's mouth. So here the pronoun "they" also does not refer to its antecedent. In the Hebrew text the pronoun "they" is

in fact a part of the verb "rolled", which is obviously used in reference to the shepherds. And we are obviously not supposed to read this text from an English grammar perspective.

### **GENESIS 30:28-29**

**And he said, Appoint me thy wages, and I will give *it*. And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle was with me. (Genesis 30:28-29)**

The earlier comments regarding the Hebrew verb for "and he said" also apply here.

It is very clear that "**and he said**" in verse 28 refers to **Laban**. And it is equally clear that "**and he said**" in verse 29 refers to **Jacob**. But again, this understanding of our English translation is not based on an understanding of English grammar. IF verse 29 would read: "**and he said, you know how much I value your services**", THEN it would be equally clear to us that the speaker in verse 29 would still be **Laban**. Obviously, it doesn't say this.

But the point once again is that our understanding of who the pronoun "he" in verse 29 refers to is based exclusively on the words that follow. We cannot rely on the rules of English grammar to lead us to a correct understanding for our English translation of these verses; **we really have to look to the context** of this translation to make the correct meaning clear.

This is an important key: the actual context itself is frequently a major key for correctly understanding the English translation of a Hebrew text. Even when there is no ambiguity in the Hebrew text, our English translation could still create some confusion because the translators didn't use a word like "replied" instead of "said", to indicate a change in speaker.

### **GENESIS 32:26-27**

And **he said**, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And **he said**, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And **he said** unto him, What *is* thy name? And **he said**, Jacob. (Genesis 32:26-27)

Here we have four consecutive uses of the pronoun "he". The Hebrew text is quite clear. But for our English language translations: in each case it is the meaning of the words that are spoken which correctly tell us to whom the pronoun "he" applies in all four cases. We have no problems at all with these two verses because the words that are spoken correctly identify to us the speakers in all four instances. But IF the words spoken were different, THEN in this particular translation this could change the identity of the individuals identified as "he" in some of those occurrences.

So again it is context and not some grammatical requirement that reveals the identities of the individuals designated by the pronoun "he".

### **GENESIS 30:34-36**

And **Laban said**, Behold, I would it might be according to thy word. **And he removed** that day the he goats that were ringstraked and spotted, and all the she goats that were speckled and spotted, *and* every one that had *some* white in it, and all the brown among the sheep, and gave *them* into the hand of **his sons**. And **he set** three days' journey betwixt **himself** and Jacob: and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks. (Genesis 30:34-36)

This one is a little trickier.

As you start to read verse 35, you could be excused for thinking that it was Laban who removed all the

designated animals that day, because that is the meaning which the rules of English grammar would imply. However, you would be wrong.

The words "**and he removed**" in verse 35 are speaking about **Jacob**! In verse 32 Jacob had already said "**I WILL PASS THROUGH ALL YOUR FLOCKS TODAY**". This makes clear that Jacob himself was going to do this.

The statement at the end of verse 35 which says "**AND GAVE THEM INTO THE HAND OF HIS SONS**" should also make clear that Jacob himself removed these animals, although many city people might question a man giving control over a large number of animals to his 6 year old son Reuben and 4-5 year old son Simeon and his 3-4 year old son Levi (baby Judah would obviously not have counted). Perhaps Dan and Naphtali were also already out of diapers, if that would have added anything to the keepers of Jacob's animals? The point is: since Jacob was looking after Laban's animals it would hardly have made sense to have Laban's sons looking after Jacob's animals ... they could just as well have looked after their father Laban's animals themselves in the first place.

Anyway, then in the expression "**and he set**" in verse 36 the pronoun "he" refers to **Laban**! This obvious meaning is made clear by the words that follow. Jacob could not possibly have set three days' journey "between himself and Jacob". It had to be Laban who set three days' journey "between himself and Jacob". Grammatically it is unexpected that the pronoun "he" in verse 36 refers to Laban, because Laban is not mentioned at all in verse 35.

This is another good example to illustrate that the pronoun "he" in our English translations need not refer to its antecedent.

## **2 KINGS 1:17**

So **he died** according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken. And Jehoram reigned **in his stead** in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah; **because he had no son**. (2 Kings 1:17)

This could be a little confusing because there were two contemporaneous kings who both had the name "Jehoram". In the kingdom of Judah Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat was reigning. And in the kingdom of Israel Jehoram the son of Ahab came to the throne.

The correct meaning is also not difficult if we just keep the context in mind. The statement "**because he had no son**" refers to **Ahaziah**, the son of Ahab. Ahaziah's name is only mentioned twice in this whole chapter, first in verse 2, and then again in verse 18.

Again, our correct understanding here relies more on understanding the context than it does on understanding points of English grammar.

Now let's consider a few other Scriptures.

## **EXODUS 4:24-25**

And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that **the LORD met him, and sought to kill him**. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast *it* at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband *art* thou to me. (Exodus 4:24-25)

Here the two successive uses of the pronoun "him" refer to two different people. The correct meaning here is; "the LORD met **him (Moses)** and sought to kill **him (Moses's son)**".

Now this is a violation of the rules of English grammar. English grammar would require the meaning to be that God sought to kill Moses himself. But that is incorrect!

Zipporah's conduct in verse 25 makes quite clear that it was the life of Moses's son that had been in danger. Zipporah in fact didn't care for the requirements God had set. She was very upset with Moses because God had threatened to kill her son unless that son was circumcised right away.

### **EXODUS 4:26**

So **he let him go**: then she said, A bloody husband *thou art*, because of the circumcision. (Exodus 4:26)

The expression "he let him go" means that **GOD let Moses's son go**. This again is not in accordance with English language grammatical requirements. The lesson for us is that we should not be too tied to interpreting a translated Hebrew text according to English language grammatical requirements. Let's look at another example.

### **JEREMIAH 36:23**

And it came to pass, *that when Jehudi had read* three or four leaves, **he cut it** with the penknife, **and cast it** into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. (Jeremiah 36:23)

According to English grammar rules one could think it was Jehudi who cut up the roll that Baruch had written. But that is not correct. It was king Jehoiakim who cut up the roll that Baruch had written. This is quite clear from verse 27 which says: "after that THE KING HAD BURNED THE ROLL".

So here we have another example where we simply have to throw English language grammatical requirements out of the window, if we wish to understand this Scripture correctly.

These are not isolated cases. This is simply how the Hebrew language functions, that the word order in a text is not the deciding factor for establishing a correct meaning. Earlier I have tried to illustrate this point by the German language example I presented, a language that most people will find somewhat easier to follow than Hebrew.

It is because we are so tied to a syntactic way of reading any text, since that is the way our English language functions, that we will at times miss the correct meaning of a statement in the Old Testament.

Let's consider another somewhat involved example.

### **2 KINGS 6:32-33**

But **Elisha** sat in his house, and the elders sat with him; and **the king** sent a man from before him: but ere **the messenger** came to him, **he said** to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head? look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door: *is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?* And **while he yet talked** with them, behold, **the messenger** came down **unto him**: and **he said**, Behold, this evil *is* of the LORD; **what should I wait for** the LORD any longer? (2 Kings 6:32-33)

The expression "the messenger came down unto him and he said" means that the messenger came to Elisha. Now by our standards the words "and he said" could refer to the messenger or perhaps even Elisha, with just a little ambiguity. But in fact the words "and he said" refer to neither Elisha nor to the messenger; the words "and he said" actually refer to the king of Israel, who happened to be Jehoram,

the son of Ahab. The same man who had addressed Elisha as "my father" in verse 21 expressed his intention to kill Elisha in verse 31.

At any rate, in spite of English language grammar rules the words "and he said" in verse 33 really refer to the king of Israel, who had decided to follow his own messenger, and thus arrived at almost the same time ("the sound of his master's feet" behind the messenger).

Again, in this passage we cannot rely on our English language understanding regarding the use of the pronoun "he". The Hebrew text of the Old Testament was simply not written with English grammar rules in mind.

## **2 KINGS 8:11**

And **he settled** his countenance stedfastly, **until he was ashamed**: and the man of God wept. (2 Kings 8:11)

This is another example of a somewhat ambiguous text in the English language.

Here Hazael had come to Elisha to enquire if Ben-Hadad would recover from his illness. Elisha had told Hazael that Ben-Hadad would certainly recover from the illness, but that he would die anyway. Then Elisha looked very steadfastly and unflinchingly at Hazael, who had his own personal ambitions, but which ambitions he had never revealed and he did not think that anyone else knew about them.

Elisha's unflinching look told Hazael that Elisha was aware of his secret ambitions, and this made Hazael ashamed. And THEN Elisha wept, because Elisha knew how cruelly Hazael would deal with the Israelites.

So the meaning of verse 11 is: "and **he (Elisha)** settled his countenance steadfastly, until **he (Hazael)** was ashamed: and (then) the man of God wept."

Again, here we can also not rely on our English language way of using the pronoun "he".

## **GENESIS 10:11-12**

Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, And Resen between Nineveh and Calah: **the same** is a great city. (Genesis 10:11-12)

Here the words "the same" are the equivalent of the third person pronoun "it". Now our English grammar rules would imply that Resen "is a great city". But that is not what this verse is telling us.

The words "**the same**" in verse 12 really refer to **Nineveh**! As Jonah 3:3 tells us, Nineveh "was an exceeding great city of three days' journey". By comparison to Nineveh Resen was always quite insignificant.

Let's look at another example, one that even certain commentators have gotten wrong.

## **GENESIS 9:24**

And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what **his younger son** had done unto him. (Genesis 9:24)

Many people think the expression "his younger son" refers to Ham. But that is not true! And here we have one more example of where you should throw the English language antecedent rule for the third



person pronoun out of the window. This text was not written with English language grammar in mind.

As in the other examples we have already examined, some of which are very obvious, it is the context that establishes the correct meaning for the words "his younger son".

Genesis chapter 10 identifies the sons of Ham as: Cush, Mizraim, Phut and Canaan (Genesis 10:6). So Canaan is identified as "a younger son" of Ham. It is highly unlikely that Canaan was the youngest son of Ham, because all three of Noah's sons continued to have many more children, besides the ones that are listed in Genesis 10 as the progenitors of the 70 original nations. So Canaan very, very likely had more younger brothers and sisters after the account recorded in Genesis 9, and therefore it would not have been appropriate to refer to Canaan as Ham's youngest son. Canaan was only one of Ham's younger sons.

The most obvious clue that "his younger son" in Genesis 9:24 is a reference to Ham's younger son Canaan is the next verse. It was BECAUSE Ham's younger son Canaan had done something to his grandfather Noah, that Noah then cursed his own grandson Canaan in Genesis 9:25. Canaan was cursed for what he himself had done, not for something his father Ham had done.

And it is totally immaterial whether Ham was the oldest son of Noah (which he wasn't) or the youngest or the one in the middle. This is not about Ham; it is about Ham's son Canaan.

Now let's consider one more example where the three consecutive uses of the pronoun "he" in one verse could create some confusion.

#### **DANIEL 9:25-27**

Consider the following verses.

Know therefore and understand, *that* from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the **Messiah the Prince shall be** seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall **Messiah** be cut off, but not for himself: and **the people of the prince** that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof *shall be* with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And **he shall confirm** the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week **he shall cause** the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations **he shall make** *it* desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate. (Daniel 9:25-27)

In verse 27 we find three occurrences of the pronoun "he". The following individuals are mentioned as antecedents in the previous two verses:

- 1) "Messiah the Prince" in verse 25.
- 2) "Messiah" in verse 26.
- 3) "the people of the prince" also in verse 26.

Some of the questions that arise are:

- 1) Is "the prince" in verse 26 the same individual as "Messiah the Prince" in verse 25? Or are these two different individuals?

- 2) Who are "the people of the prince" in verse 26?
- 3) Who is the "he" that confirms the covenant?
- 4) Who is the "he" that shall cause the sacrifice to cease?
- 5) Who is "he" that makes desolate?

The only antecedents to the three occurrences of "he" in verse 27 are the Messiah and the people of the prince in verse 26. "The people of the prince" would really require the plural pronoun "they". So "Messiah" is really the only direct antecedent for the singular pronoun "he" in verse 27.

Now let's look at these verses more closely.

The purpose of **verse 25** is to pinpoint **the start of Jesus Christ's ministry**. This verse tells us about a period of  $62 + 7 = 69$  weeks = 483 days, where each day represents one year. So from the going out of the commandment in Ezra 7:13 (which was very likely 457 B.C.) there would be 483 years to the start of Jesus Christ's ministry. Since there was no year "Zero" between B.C. and A.D., that takes us to 27 A.D. for the start of Jesus Christ's ministry.

[COMMENT: I have used 457 B.C. only for illustration purposes. To me it makes no difference whether the decree went out in 457 B.C. or whether it went out in either 456 B.C. or 458 B.C., which would place the start of Christ's ministry one year earlier or one year later than 27 B.C. Here in this article I am only concerned with establishing the general context for this passage, without arguing about the exact year for the start of Christ's ministry.]

Let's keep in mind that this is a "70 weeks prophecy" (Daniel 9:24); it is not a "69 weeks prophecy". So when 69 weeks take us up to the start of Jesus Christ's ministry, then there is clearly one more week that needs to be fulfilled in one way or another.

Thus at the start of Daniel 9:26 there is still one week remaining.

So **verse 26** then tells us that the Messiah would be cut off (i.e. killed) at some point after the first 69 weeks have been completed. He is obviously only "cut off" after He has started His ministry, not before He starts His ministry.

After telling us that the Messiah would be killed, THEN "the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city". This is a reference to Jerusalem being destroyed by the Romans sometime AFTER Jesus Christ had been crucified. This tells us that "the prince" here in verse 26 is NOT the same as "Messiah the Prince". Here in verse 26 "the people of the prince" refers to the Roman armies. And the leader of those Roman armies is here designated as "the prince". His presence is inferred but not directly stated. However, this inferred presence of the leader of the Roman armies should alert us to the possibility in the Hebrew text of an additional antecedent for the pronoun "he" in the next verse.

As an aside: there are three different Hebrew words that can be used to refer to "people". The Hebrew word used in this verse is "am". The other two Hebrew words are "goy" and "le'om". In general terms: "le'om" is used to identify **"a race of people"**. "Goy" is used to identify **"a nation"**. Think of the Hebrew "goyim" as "nations". The word "am" is used to identify **"a group of people more numerous than a tribe, but less numerous than a race"**. The word "am" is also commonly used to identify military troops, i.e. **an army**. And that is what we have in verse 26. The fact that these people destroy the city and the sanctuary makes clear that this is a reference to an army.

The last part of verse 26 ("the end thereof shall be with a flood and unto the end of the war ...") takes the scenario down to the end times.

So note!

Verse 26 has not given us any details regarding the 70<sup>th</sup> week. Since verse 27 is the last verse that applies to the 70 weeks prophecy, it follows that verse 27 must now give us some information about that 70<sup>th</sup> week. So now let's examine verse 27 with the three occurrences of the pronoun "he".

The statement "He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week" presents us with the missing week. This one week brings the total to 70 weeks. The context for the first 69 weeks centered on "Messiah the Prince" in verse 25. So the expression "He shall confirm" refers to the Messiah.

The expression "confirm the covenant" literally means "give strength to the covenant". The covenant hinges on Jesus Christ giving His life for our sins. The whole statement means that Jesus Christ has allotted "one week" (i.e. 7 years) for His ministry.

### **NOW THERE IS A SWITCH IN THE IDENTITY OF "HE"!**

Now the identity for "he" switches to "the prince" who is **the leader of the invading army**. Again this switch is not based on the rules of English grammar. It is a mistake to try to reason out some theoretically possible meaning that would be compatible with how the pronoun "he" is used in English. This wasn't written with our English grammar in mind.

So verse 27 tells us:

After the Messiah has completed a ministry of 3 years, then THE ROMAN LEADER would cause "the sacrifice and the oblation to cease"! This is a reference to the Roman leader in Jerusalem (i.e. Pontius Pilate at that point in time) making the decision to have Jesus Christ killed. Jesus Christ submitted to being put to death, but Jesus Christ did NOT "cause" His own death!

A key point for understanding that this part of verse 27 represents a change in identity for the pronoun "he" is the fact that the Hebrew verb for "cease" (i.e. the verb "shabath") is here used with **the hiphil stem**. The hiphil stem expresses causative action. That is why most translations for this verse include the words "**he shall cause**", or words to that effect!

It was the Romans who caused the sacrificial system of the Jewish religion to cease when they destroyed the Temple. While that destruction of the Temple did not occur until 70 A.D., the actual process culminating in the destruction of the city and the Temple was set in motion when the Romans crucified Jesus Christ, in the middle of His 7-year ministry.

In the expression "**and for the overspreading of abominations**" the word translated as "overspreading" (i.e. "kanaph") literally refers to "a wing". What this expression means is that the coming "detestable things" (i.e. abominations) will occur under the auspices or patronage of the Roman leader (i.e. he takes those responsible for causing all those detestable things "under his wings").

The expression "**he shall make desolate**" continues to refer to the prince who is identified as the leader of the Roman army. So it was the Romans who made Jerusalem desolate. "**The consummation**" (the Hebrew word "kalah" refers to "a full end") takes this statement all the way down to the end times. This is the same perspective as we saw at the end of verse 26.

At the end the things that are "**determined**" shall be poured out upon those who fight against the

returning Jesus Christ, the Messiah who had been cut off in the first part of verse 26. The expression "**poured upon**" I take as a reference to the seven last plagues being "poured out" in Revelation 16.

So let's summarize the three uses of "he" in Daniel 9:27.

- "He shall confirm" refers to Jesus Christ;
- "he shall cause ... to cease" refers to the Roman "prince";
- "he shall make desolate" also refers to the Roman "prince".

And just as we saw in Genesis 32:26-27, it is always the words that follow "he" that identify the individual who is being referred to with this person pronoun "he", rather than the requirements of some English language rules of grammar.

So much for examples. Now here is the point for all of us:

Whenever we are faced with a Scripture where the identity of people referred to by the third person pronoun is unclear or even controversial, then we should never try to reason out a conclusion based on grammatical requirements of the English language. In the Hebrew text the pronouns "he" and "they" are not used from our grammatical point of view.

Yes, in well over 95% of cases the uses of "he" and "they" either agree with English grammatical requirements, or, if they disagree with English usage, they are nevertheless easy to understand because of the whole context in which these pronouns appear. But that is nothing more than fortuitous coincidence. And it would be a mistake to try to reason out the identity of a specific appearance of "he" based on nothing more than our own grammatical experiences with this pronoun.

Put another way: in these cases the problem is not usually with either the Hebrew text or the translation; in these cases the problem lies in the way we try to understand the English translation based on English language rules of grammar. The two languages (English and Hebrew) reflect two different ways of thinking. A reader of a Hebrew text approaches every pronoun in the text from a different mental perspective compared to the perspective with which the reader approaches an English text.

The Hebrew reader approaches every pronoun with an enquiring mind, trying to figure out who is being referred to based on the context, without assuming that the pronoun of necessity has to apply to its antecedent. The English reader, on the other hand, approaches every pronoun with the assumption that it must refer to its antecedent UNLESS the context very clearly indicates otherwise. The English reader has a syntax mentality.

But SOMETIMES, like in Genesis 9:24 and in Daniel 9:27, the correct identity for the pronoun "he" cannot be established by appeals to its antecedent.

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