

# YEAR–DAY PRINCIPLE

## An Aging Concept?

The “year–day principle” has been a mechanical rule that historicists use to encounter Biblical periods of the past. Its application restricts and, therefore, denies the rich allusions to eschatological prophetic time periods. Yet, it is one that many today defend. The defense of this “principle” comes from an aged methodology supported by two key texts: Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6. These have been “hermeneutic tools” to define what selective prophetic numbers and periods mean. Yet – there is no contextual instruction that they are to be interpretive prophetic guidelines elsewhere in Scripture.

The concept that in certain time prophecies a “prophetic day” represents an entire calendar year is the distinguishing characteristic of the “year–day principle.” There has not, however, been any consistent rule as to when it should be applied. Some conclude that if a time period is contextually within a prophecy of surreal imagery, it is “prophetic time” (i.e., Daniel 7:25, 8:14). Others arbitrarily apply it to a myriad of numerical periods, justifying the application against the “rejection of literal time.” Daniel 12 is a premier example.

Others posture this way: “As early as the third century B.C.E., the 70 weeks of Daniel 9 were understood to be 70 ‘weeks of years,’ i.e.  $70 \times 7 = 490$  years. The LXX, in translating the Hebrew for ‘weeks’ in Dan 9:25-27, inserted the additional phrase ‘of years,’ providing the first published example of what would later be called the ‘year–day principle.’”<sup>1</sup>

Yet, little scholarly work seeks to discover other reasons expositors, especially of the Septuagint era, might have had for saying “of years.” Contextually, that prophecy is one of the most significant timing predictions of Scripture. Gabriel extended to Daniel’s people 70 weeks (yes, “of years” is implied) of probation to bring in everlasting righteousness. It relates to the reason the Jewish people were in Babylon. That is our first timing clue. It is associated with missed *Shemitas* and implies Sabbatical-year language, making “of years” accurate based on Leviticus 25 (not Numbers or Ezekiel).

How one interprets *time* prophecies will dramatically influence his or her historical or end-time views. In turn, that characterizes one’s “apocalyptic perspective.” Is the *Revelation* an urgent warning, a novelty message, a curious history or perhaps so distant in the future it is of no concern? If *predictive* timing messages have already been *fulfilled* in the past, there are few exciting residuals to share except “parables” of “has beens.” If, for instance, the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 is a pivotal sign of the Messiah’s coming, the “end of time” is lasting so long it is now devoid of meaning. Is the devastation from the earthquake and tsunami of December 26, 2004, of any eschatological merit? Only short-lived voices using this as an excuse to talk of the *parousia* (second coming) are briefly heard. Apocalyptic thinking without a timing clue offers little meaning or urgency to such a devastating event. The year–day issue, in how it has been applied, stands indicted for promoting apathy.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://sdanet.org/atissue/end/yearday.htm>. [L. E. Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 4 vols. (*The Review and Herald*, 1950), 1:170, 174-176]. Moon, Jerry; *The Year–Day Principle and the 2300 Days*.

The Bible has specific cues to inform its students of *when* and *what events* are significant. Jesus, as an example, said that the “onset” of His *collective* end-time signs would be completed within *one generation* (Matthew 24:34, Mark 13:30, Luke 21:32) (a “timing” prophetic issue collecting dust with many expositors). That alone tells us that the end comes over a *restricted* period. Commensurate with an infatuation to the past is the Cross. If everything important to salvation occurred there, there appears to be excess material in the Canon that could be easily dispensed with. Aren’t there other issues couched within the framework of time that relate to the redemptive process that unfold after the Cross, even right to the very end within a time period? What do we do with all the prophetic clock periods, dates, sequences and appointments that somehow remain in a morass of uncertain passages? **Time** is a fourth dimension to predictive visions and auditions. There is something wonderful about a story when we know the “when” of it. Jesus knew that when He said “**When** ye therefore shall see ...” (Matthew 24:15).

Prophecy is event-driven, in sequence and *always* framed within a timing infrastructure. How we “tell time” determines how significant those Biblical passages are to us! That, in turn, relates to whether they are currently important or relics of the past and then only Biblical factoids. It is tenuous to determine what prophecy is relevant to Christ’s second coming unless we know what the Biblical clocks say. Prophetic studies must begin there!

Daniel 8, as one example, alludes to over ten timing issues, not one of which relates to Numbers 14 or Ezekiel 4. If only the linguistics, events and imagery are studied, they parallel Daniel 7. If *unrelated to the context of time*, we will conclude that they are a “chunk of the same” prophetic “real estate.” Those *timing* words and phrases (i.e., 8:17 and 19), **however**, place Daniel 8 in our era. Daniel 8 is loaded with deliverance, covenant and restoration language. God invites us into an elevated typological study that has *contemporary relevance*. The past becomes a beautiful metaphor for a greater message surrounding the great finale of sin’s conflict.

Thus, the issue demanding resolution by expositors is *how to tell time*. The Biblical clocks tick, have alarms, are divided into a myriad of fascinating digital periods (yes, some are 24-hour periods, a day, alluding to a year – but **unrelated** to Numbers and Ezekiel), and bond intimately to prophetic images and events.

One clock in Daniel 8:14, as an example, is expressed as an “*evening and morning*” – just like a Creation day. But this *evening and morning* clock relates to the **annual** Day of Atonement, which then suggests a year for that day! Those yearly feasts are loaded with clocks that often “tick” with prophecy! That, for example, helps us evaluate that 2300 number, where the word “day” doesn’t exist in the original, but the term “evening and morning” does! Interesting – the “2300” are years from the annual Day of Atonement *evening and morning* typology.

If we tell time in approximation, we might miss the train. That’s why most of God’s clocks are digital – they are precise and accurate – if we just learn *how to tell time*.

This is why the *year–day* matter must be resolved. Scholars posture as if it were sacred, but selectively determine which prophecies it might apply to and which ones it doesn’t. But the prophetic clock rules are very definitive in the Canon. If one accepts the *year–day* principle as a valid tool, how does one pick and choose his prophecy? Appeals to great Biblical scholars of history who applied it cannot resolve that question. The sheer number of loyalists to the year–day camp can never validate that viewpoint as truth.

Linguists appeal to such verses as “for all our **days** pass away under thy wrath, our **years** come to an end like a sigh. The **days** of our **years** be three score and ten” (Psalm 90:9-10) to offer another proof of a year–day or day–year Semitic parallel to chronological prophecy. That is simply illogical! No Biblical permission is given to tie such texts to prophetic interpretation. Such expressions are *cultural expressions* totally unrelated to an interpreting hermeneutic tool. Numbers and Ezekiel relate to apostasy of God’s people and God’s judicial response. End-time prophetic key? Not in the least!

One group<sup>2</sup> that briefly dealt with this issue noted: “The year-day relationship can be Biblically supported, although it is **not** explicitly identified **as a principle** of prophetic interpretation.... Furthermore, the Old Testament provides illustrations of the year-day interchangeability in symbolism (Gen. 29:27; Num. 14:34; Eze. 4:6; Dan. 9:24-27).”<sup>3</sup> Which way do we go? Do we use it or not? It is a *culturally-supported concept*, yet *not identified* in the Bible as a prophetic tool! If so, how do we apply it consistently? The textual illustrations involve a cultural expression, divine judicial sentencing for apostasy and *Shemita* language – all unrelated to each other.

There are many examples of a day for a year. But they relate to established annual events, such as the feasts.

Another scholar and administrator noted: “Although the year-day principle is not affirmed explicitly, the various examples quoted [Genesis 29:27, 41:25-30] show that a principle of calculation was employed from the patriarchal period at least to the time of the Exile that established a day-year, year-day, or even a week-year relationship. There are yet other relationships based on the same principle. This makes it perfectly correct to state that there is a biblical principle according to which ‘a day in prophecy stands for a year’”<sup>4</sup> It is “not affirmed explicitly” yet it is “perfectly correct to state.” That’s a problem.

These positions point out the challenge. There are year–day clocks. But there are also week–year, day–millennial and day–month prophetic timepieces. And – there are literal time prophecies that mean everything to God’s people right at the end. How do we know which clock to use? The answer is in the **prophetic context** and **using correct hermeneutics**.

### **The Beginning of “Time”**

God initially defined time by celestial objects to “divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years” (Genesis 1:14). The sun and moon, by God’s original design, became time pieces for mankind. Their broadest application in a sinless world is not revealed because the story of sin begins in Scripture immediately after the Creation account.

God introduced another clock at Creation – the weekly cycle. It was based on seven *evenings* and *morning*s. It embodied a sequence, and the seventh period was dedicated, set apart, as holy. That was the origin of the Sabbath. Man was to honor that day as sacred. It was to never change. Thus, Adam and Eve were to count 1 to 7 and preserve the integrity of this most unique time piece. Totally unrelated to any celestial object of creation, the Sabbath could not be worshiped as an object where one might say it “represented” what God designed. By design and

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<sup>2</sup> *Sanctuary Review Committee of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*.

<sup>3</sup> *Adventist Review*, September 4, 1980, p. 14; *Ministry*, October, 1980, p. 18 (emphasis added).

<sup>4</sup> Zurcher, Jean; “The year–day Principle,” *Adventist Review*, July 12, 1981.

decree the weekly cycle became a divine institution. Extending to our time, 6000 years later, that week has seven days based on counting the sequence!

When sin arrived, so did prophecy and promise. New clocks were introduced that became tools to understand *redemption* and predictive messages. The year was one of them – but not the only one. The weekly cycle – that heavenly appointed clock – became a *template* for other time pieces, all based on 1–7 with the seventh being set apart and sacred.

In the Biblical record, therefore, we find 7 days, 7 weeks, 7 months, 7 years, 70 times 7 and 7 millenniums presented as *defined periods*. The study of each one reveals amazing clues as to how to interpret a time period inside a prophecy.

We already illustrated a unique tool that comes from the 7 days of Creation. The *sequence* of “evening and morning” (not “morning and evening”) has great significance. When that *sequence* is presented, it is typological. It represents a *sacred appointed time*. That means the Creation days are sacred. How? They form the typological foundation of **all** prophetic time.

Aaron’s two sons, Nadab and Abihu, offered strange fire “before the Lord” (Leviticus 10:1). This was apparently in the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle. Fire “went out” from the Lord and killed them (Leviticus 10:2). Shortly thereafter the Lord spoke to Moses regarding the incident. He was to convey to Aaron that entering the Most Holy Place was not to be a casual experience. God was going to make His presence above the mercy seat, so a new statute was instituted called the Day of Atonement. Only on that day, specifically set aside on the tenth day of the seventh month (Tishri), would entering the Most Holy Place even be possible, and then only by the High Priest (Leviticus 16).

That would be a Day of Atonement for the *nation*. Israel’s place of meeting God was to be the tabernacle, with the nation’s representatives being the priests (Leviticus 16:33). The Hebrew word for atonement is *kaphar*. It comes from an Arabic root meaning to “cover” or “conceal.”<sup>5</sup> It is related to a similar word used in Genesis 6:14 where Noah was to waterproof the ark by “covering it” (*kaphar*) with pitch. God told Moses that the Day of Atonement was to be an “everlasting statute” “to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins [to cover them over] *once a year*” (Leviticus 16:33-34).

That day was to be a Sabbath (Leviticus 23:32). Intriguingly, its sacredness began on the ninth day (and here it is) – the *evening before* the tenth (Leviticus 23:32). That is stunning. That sacred day, when sin would be *covered over*, then removed, started on the *evening before*. The 2300 *evening and morning* prophecy of Daniel 8:14 was given by Jesus as a partial response to Gabriel’s question of 8:13. “How long” or “until when” would the transgression of desolation occur? Jesus made it clear that the prophecy of the little horn (prophetically tied to the ram and he-goat) would not occur until the end of, or after, 2300 *evenings and mornings* were finished (8:17, 19). Then, in legal language tied to a covenant and Daniel 9, he described precisely **when** sin would be removed. That is atonement language when sin is covered over (by redemptive blood) and then removed. But, and this is so beautiful – there it is – related to these Sabbatical years, which in turn, tie to the Jubilee when everything is restored. We don’t need a “year–day

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<sup>5</sup> Harris, R. Laird; *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Moody Press; Chicago, IL), 1980, vol. 1, p. 452.

principle.” All we need to understand is the *annual* atonement restoration theme and the meaning of the great *Shemita* cycles. It then all remarkably comes into place.

Again, the word “days” is missing from the original in Daniel 8:14. It simply says: Until 2300 *evenings mornings* holiness vindicated (or adjudicated). That portrays a legal process that judicially resolves sin (and this is amazing) through the vindication of holiness. The word for vindication (adjudication) is *nisdaq*. It is a passive verb. Something makes it happen. This is now beautifully described in 9:24, where God’s people are to give up sin. When they do, everlasting righteousness (*tsedeq* – noun) comes in. Holiness is vindicated by God’s people giving up sin! It is the ultimate story of how He gets a bride. The love story that began in Daniel 9 (a prophecy), ends in 8:14!

Some argue that the evening and morning were only a half day. The beauty of a holy message is thereby lost – period. The Creation model is our reference – and “the evening and the morning were the ... day” (Genesis 1). Subjectively and objectively, the theme of 8:14 simply conveys that after 2300 atonement days (they were annual, therefore represented years), something legal, holy, dramatic would begin that would lead to everlasting righteousness when the Most Holy would be anointed – no sin left (9:24). The sanctuary is then anointed.

The year–day principle as described by Ezekiel and Numbers doesn’t fit and cheapens the incredible message within these prophecies. God is preparing a people to be His. It is presented in covenant–restoration language when sin is forever “covered over.”

He is choosing witnesses to God’s character who will be everlasting representatives of who that Leader of the universe really is! That starts at the end of or shortly after the 2300 atonement *evenings* and *mornings*.

Another interesting concept relates to the Hebrew word for “day” (*yom* or *yowm*). If it is alone, it could have all kinds of symbolic significance. But when it’s associated with a number, it is always literal.<sup>6,7,8,9</sup> That is so simple a rule and so profound to prophetic understanding. That means the 1290 “days” and 1335 “days” of Daniel 12 involve literal days of time! A year–day principle for Daniel 12? No! It would totally destroy the meaning and shred the end-time *context* the Bible associates with the deliverance of God’s people and the special resurrection (12:1-2).

### **Does the “year–day” principle have a prophetic application?**

Absolutely! But we turn to the model of time God has designed. There is a week of days (the weekly cycle), a week of months (the sacred festal time – Leviticus 23) and next a week of years (perhaps the most solemn clock in the Old Testament), the seventh year being a Sabbath.

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<sup>6</sup> Cassuto, Umberto; *Genesis I* (1961), p. 29, as quoted by Harris, R. Laird, et al. in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. II, p. 694.

<sup>7</sup> Hasel, Gerard F.; *The “Days” of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal “Days” or Figurative “Periods/epochs” of Time?* (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI).

<sup>8</sup> Stambaugh, James; *The days of Creation: A semantic approach* (Evangelical Theological Society papers, ETS-0152, 1996), pp. 3-4, 10, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Gentry, Kenneth L, Jr.; *Ordained Servant, “In the Space of Six Days”* (extract), vol. 9, no. 1 (January 2000), pp. 12-16.

Three prescriptions were to be observed during that year (Exodus 23:10-11; Leviticus 25:1-7; Deuteronomy 15:1-11, 31:10-13):

- The land was to lie fallow and all agricultural labor was to be suspended. There was to be neither plowing nor sowing, nor were the vines and olives to be attended to. The spontaneous yield was not to be garnered, but was to be left in the fields for common use, and what was not used was to be abandoned to the cattle and wild animals (Exodus 23:10-11, Leviticus 25:1-7). Of the fruit trees the olive is alone mentioned, because its oil was one of the three great agricultural products; but the law probably applied also to other trees.
- With no crops being reaped during the sabbatical year, the payment of debts would have been a great hardship, if not an impossibility, for many. Hence the creditor was commanded “to withhold his hand” and not to exact a debt from an **Israelite**, though he might demand it of strangers, who were not bound to abstain from agricultural pursuits (Deuteronomy 15:1-3, Hebrew text). The **Talmudists** and many after them understood the law to mean the remission of the debt; but modern commentators generally hold that it merely suspended the obligation to pay, and deferred the creditor from extracting the debt during that sacred year.
- During that sabbatical year the Law was to be read on the **Feast of Tabernacles** to all **Israel** – men, women, and children – as well as to the stranger within the gates, that they might know and fear the **Lord**, and fulfill all the words of the Law (Deuteronomy 31:10-13).

During this Sabbatical or seventh year one could not behave as an owner of land. The poor had free and full access to the crops and orchards. *It was one year when everyone became equal.* Together – as one – they could worship God.

This was so important that God noted they would be exiled from the land if that *Shemita* or Sabbath was broken. The year–day typology of the creation week was instituted **by this seven-year statute**. The seventh year represented unity, cleansing, deliverance and dependency. It was a time of utter trust in God. Through resting on that Sabbath, man learns that it is really God who is directing and perpetuating life.

In the Garden of Eden there was no concept of ownership or possession. During the Sabbatical year all the produce of the trees and fields became ownerless so that everyone could experience the earth as belonging to all, *just as at the beginning*. For someone who works six years to build up his land or estate, it is no easy task to admit that one does not ultimately really own his land. It is on loan from the true Owner and is really for the benefit of all. Finally, there is an awareness of a connection between eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the exile from the Garden to the expulsion of the Jews from Canaan, exiled to Babylon, for not observing the Sabbatical year. This association itself alludes to the essence of the Holy Land resembling the primordial Garden of Eden. Breaking the Sabbath was like eating of the forbidden tree. Canaan was to symbolize the “land of promise,” restoration, where the evil of the past is gone forever. In turn, that *Shemita* year was an enactment of the future imagery of the “heavenly Canaan.”

God provided a commentary on how Israel followed His will. The breach in honoring the Sabbatical year led Jeremiah to prophesy: “*And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an*

*astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years” (Jeremiah 25:11).*

*“For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place” (Jeremiah 29:10).*

More than a generation was lost to the Babylonian captivity. The sacredness of the Creation Sabbath day became a great metaphor for unity and dependence in the *Shemita* year. **That** is the year–day concept that is the true basis of most prophecy – especially in Daniel 9 and 12 as a “week of years!”

*“And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years” (II Chronicles 36:20-21).*

At the end of time, within one generation, the world will be given the chance to come out of Babylon to return to the promised land. The focus of much end-time prophecy is on the **last period of that generation** called the “appointed time.” That is, in turn, associated with the abomination that leads to desolation (Matthew 24:15) as spoken by Daniel the prophet.

Where does the true year–day principle tie to prophecy? There are numerous allusions to that. Jesus Himself used both in Luke 13:6-33. But the premier prophecy relates to the 70 weeks of Daniel 9:24. Israel had been in captivity for 70 years – one year for each *Shemita* dishonored. Daniel was studying the prophecies and understood that, which led to his Daniel 9 prayer. Then Gabriel gave the “70-weeks” prophecy. It related to the restoration of a nation – a people. It was a second chance for Israel – but also the last chance. Israel was once again required to traverse another 70 *Shemitas* or Sabbatical years. They represented 70 weeks “of years.” The **context** is related to this statute, and ties directly to covenant fulfillment and is in Jubilee language of Leviticus 25, when everything is redeemed. The prophetic calculation is not from Numbers or Ezekiel. That would be out of context. It is beautifully derived from the *Shemita* statutes.

This is reinforced by Daniel 11. Gabriel returned, and in a summation prophecy, revealed the key kings and leaders who would arise during that probationary period right up to the one who would be a raiser of taxes, which led Mary and Joseph to go to Bethlehem during the time of Caesar Augustus. Each king was like a clock ticking, indicating that probation was getting shorter (Daniel 11:2-20).

To simply state that it was a year–day principle of Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6 sells short the incredible weeks of years or Sabbatical week. End-time redemptive history is bonded to our grasp of Leviticus 25 and Daniel 9.

Thus, each prophecy must be studied in context and without an ill-defined hermeneutic formula. Beginning in Daniel and moving then to Revelation, there is a stunning continuity of timing prophecies. Which clock to use becomes clear. The literal time periods of Daniel 12 envelop the repeated three and a half year periods in Revelation. Prophecy and its timing framework leave no room for arbitrary formulas, anecdotal applications or opinions. God’s rules are precise, lean on the Jewish theocracy for typological instruction and create beautiful keys to unlock the future.

This is only a brief résumé of issues related to time within prophecy. The use of Numbers 14 and Ezekiel 4 to create a way to deal with the vast network of prophecy cheapens a large segment of Scripture. The incredible tools given to Israel in their statutes clearly open the doors to the apocalyptic prophetic periods – so important to God’s people – right now.

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*EndTime Issues...*, No. 86, February 2007