

The Day-for-a-Year Principle— Is it Biblical? (Part Two)

Is there a day-for-a-year principle that can be applied to prophetic interpretation? Is it possible to selectively choose when and where to apply a day-for-a-year principle respective to biblical prophecy? Can we have confidence in the prophetic outcomes and conclusions by using a day-for-a-year principle to interpret biblical prophecy?

From the biblical account we learn that Pharaoh Necho appointed Eliakim to be king over Judah after the death of King Josiah, and Pharaoh changed the new king's name to Jehoiakim. Then, in his eleventh year of reign over Judah, King Jehoiakim was removed from power and taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in c. 598 BCE, as likely were other officials surrounding Jehoiakim's government, and probably some of the priests, as the king of Babylon also looted the Temple.

Nebuchadnezzar then appointed Jehoiachin to be king, and he was eight years old when he began his reign over Judah, but before he could finish his accession year, he was taken captive to Babylon in March of c. 597 BCE. Once again there may have been some of the priests and the king's advisors who were also taken into captivity as Nebuchadnezzar set his

hand a second time to take the “goodly vessels of the house of the Lord” (II Chr. 36:5-7; 10).

So began the first of Jehoiachin's thirty-seven years in Babylonian imprisonment.

In Jehoiachin's fifth year of captivity we see that the priest and prophet Ezekiel was also “among the captives” in the land of the Chaldeans living by the River Chebar. Some scholars consider this to be perhaps a river in the community of Tel-abib, while others identify it with the Grand Canal (nâru kabari) of Nebuchadnezzar. (Of note is that Ezekiel's prophecies and visions correspond to the years of Jehoiachin's captivity in Babylon.)

Thus, in Jehoiachin's later years of captivity we see the prophet Ezekiel continuing to demonstrate his prophecies to the people of Israel, even after the fall of Jerusalem, casting his prophecies forward to a future time. Sometimes this meant that he would act out some difficult tasks in front of the people, and one of these tasks was mitigated by the “day for a year” scale regarding the punishment that would befall the people of Israel.

Now, in the book of Ezekiel we read that God required him to lie on his “left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it:

according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it thou shalt bear their iniquity. For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year” (Ezk. 4:4-6). (Notice that Ezekiel would bear the burden of Israel’s iniquities against God.)

This, of course, was done as a sign to the people of Israel, and we see that a legal principle is again applied in this case regarding the burden of iniquity, which is to say that the measure of the burden was “appointed” based on a “day for a year,” and it was Ezekiel—not Israel—who had to symbolically bear the burden. So, we can’t help but notice that the scale of sentence severity is stated as it was in the time of Moses, but in this case it was based upon a given number of years, and according to the scale the years became days, and so Ezekiel was to lie upon his left side for 390 days and then on his right side for 40 days. (These 390 years cannot be assessed from the rule of Jeroboam.)

Simply, Ezekiel had to bear the full burden of Israel’s iniquities for 430 days, and that meant the years became days based on the formula

that God used to reckon the burden that fell upon Ezekiel.

We see then the application of the “day for a year” scale is different for Ezekiel than it was for the people of ancient Israel in the time of Moses. For here we have the “day for a year” scale, and its application is also a day for year, and so instead of receiving a year for each day, Ezekiel received a day for each year. Considering also that this is still a legal judgment based on Israel’s iniquities, as iniquities are indeed a legal matter spiritually, and so we can say with confidence that the context for Ezekiel’s actions was one of comprehending the magnitude of God’s judgment and the burden that Ezekiel was to symbolically bear for all Israel.

Interestingly, there are those who make use of this application by turning “times” into years and the years into days, and then they turn the days into prophetic years while attempting to find an historical marker that fits this expanded paradigm respective to some prophecies. An example of this is the notable idiom found in the book of Daniel, which states: “and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time,” and this is thought by some to represent a three and one-half year period of time (360 days in a year) (Dan. 7:25).

Thus, the “time and times and the dividing of time” is changed to three and one-half years,

then it is changed into 1260 days, and from there it is changed again into 1260 prophetic years of church persecution, which means that at some time during the more than 1950 years of church existence these “prophetic years” must be made to fit somewhere into an historical context, and that context is arbitrary at best, because there are several different possibilities for the starting and ending dates. Noting also that the assumption behind this application is that the beasts of Daniel 7 are thought to be only sequential, but the prophecy makes it clear that at some point they are all contemporary in their action and purpose, because the book of Daniel states that three of the beasts had their dominions taken away, but they still lived for a “season” and a “time” beyond the punishment of the fourth kingdom.

The irony of this 1260 prophetic year interpretation of Daniel’s prophecy is that some take the 1260 days mentioned in Revelation 12 and claim the church was historically protected for 1260 years. Others still believe the church will be protected in a “place of safety” for three and one-half years, but they don’t bother changing those years into days and then into 1260 prophetic years in such a place. Such is the selective nature of the day-for-a-year principle when it is applied to biblical prophecy because it shows how easily it suits the interpreter’s point of view and not the statement of Scripture (Dan. 7:8-25; Rev. 12:6-17).

In actuality, the notion that a “time” represents “one year” in Daniel’s prophecy is a conventional interpretation, which is to say that it is an interpretation arrived at by a consensus of long-standing opinion, but as this verse is written in Aramaic, and the word in question is ܐܝܢܐ, ‘iddân, which corresponds generally to the Hebrew מוֹעֵד, mō’êd, an appointed season, it is difficult to establish that this is talking about an actual year. Thus, we read that some people are “given into his hand” and it is for a time period that marks anniversaries from when it began, and so it may also be accounted for by a spring to spring or summer to summer reckoning—depending—without any specific beginning or ending dates being ascertained (Dan. 7:25).

Simply, we could say we are talking about a season with anniversaries and there is a beginning and an ending period, and it is not a permanent situation without intervention, and the ending and beginning of this period is associated with an event related to the servants of God, and the event has a measure of time, and that period of time may turn out to be three and one-half years. (To assume that Daniel’s prophecy is only speaking of the church is to ignore the broader context of this prophecy, and the timeframe in question is defined by the nature of its characteristics—the season of the “wearing out the saints”—and so the starting and ending points of the

prophecy are defined by watched-for events (Mk. 13:33.)

Another example can be taken from the time when Michael the “great prince” will intervene for those written in a book of deliverance, and the intervention begins at the end of a “time, times, and an half” after a scattering of the people has already been accomplished.

So, we could say that it is referring to a “season of scattering,” and this too may be a three-and-one-half year period of time. But it may not have the same beginning and ending dates as another season, such as when Jerusalem is “trodden down of the gentiles,” until the “times be fulfilled,” and in some cases the beginning and ending of these events may not even be known to all who witness them. The example would be the “abomination that maketh desolate,” spoken of by Jesus, who never put this prophecy into the context of prophetic years, but rather, he said, that when you “shall see” this event, then know that a time has come for some to flee (Dan. 12:1, 7; Mt. 24:15-16; Lk. 21:24).

Consequently, in matters of these prophecies, it is better to follow the advice of Jesus and learn a parable of the fig tree.

Now, let’s take a moment and review the example of the travel map and the mileage scale indicator that is understood by this type

of scale, because we would never consider for a moment taking a travel distance scale and applying it in some unrelated manner to a different subject, such as a recipe for cooking food, or a chemistry experiment or the ratio of ingredients used to make up a particular medicine. Yet, that is what is being done in principle when people take the “day for a year” scale as it pertains to God’s judgment and discretion for sentencing and apply it to selected prophecies in a way that changes their interpretation, incorrectly and selectively asserting that “days” equal “years” in regard to prophecy.

But there is a little more to think about.

The notion of scale in judgment is a way of mitigating or adding weight to a sentence, and so, for example, the more years of iniquity assessed against Israel, the more days Ezekiel had to lie on his left side, while keeping in mind that it was assessed differently for Judah. Likewise, when God had determined to plague the people of Israel in the wilderness, it was Moses who acted as a mediator before God on behalf of the people to change the punishment that was certain to befall the people of ancient Israel. Thus, it was God who changed his mind, and it was he who set the framework—a day for a year—by which he would make his judgment, and this scale of sentence severity became a way to mitigate the punishment, even though the final sentence meant a disinheritance for

many who would not receive their portion of the Promised Land.

Meaning that the “day for a year” scale was applied as a legal principle to the act of rebellion against God, and it mitigated the sentence to prevent the people from being immediately destroyed by a plague, and in the case of Ezekiel, it mitigated the sentence so that he did not have to bear Israel’s and Judah’s burdens for 430 years.

Summarily, then, we can say that there is no such thing as a day-for-a-year principle respective to prophetic timeframes, and we have no biblical example purporting a prophetic day-for-a-year principle in this manner. But there was a scale of sentence severity used by God to mitigate the burden given to Ezekiel and the severity of punishment measured out to the rebellious people of ancient Israel.  **(End of two-part series.)**