



## Session 14 ■ Special Interest Topic 1 Understanding Prophetic Time Spans

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In the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation different imagery is linked together by a common time period used to describe wicked powers dominating God's people and giving them a difficult time.

This same period of time is expressed in various ways as follows:

- Daniel 7:25 talks of God's people being handed over to a "little horn" power for a time, two times and half a time, that is  $3\frac{1}{2}$  times.

Daniel 12:7 links the breaking of the power of the holy people as being associated with a time period of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  times.

- Revelation 11:2 talks of the holy city being trodden under foot by the Gentiles for 42 months. The "holy city" is a term used to describe God's people, and "the Gentiles" is a term to express those who are not God's people. It is similar to an expression Jesus used in Luke 21:24.
- Revelation 11:3 repeats the same event by stating that the Two Witnesses (God's people) will prophesy in sackcloth for 1260 days.

Revelation 12:6 describes the woman (the followers of Jesus) fleeing into the wilderness for 1260 days.

Revelation 12:14 repeats the same event by stating the period of time to be  $3\frac{1}{2}$  times.

- Revelation 13:5 states that the beast will exercise authority for 42 months.

### How these time periods are interpreted

If we have a time as the way of explaining a prophetic year of 360 days and you multiply 360 by three-and-a-half prophetic years, we will get 1260 days.

If each year is 360 days, each month will be a 30-day month. If we multiply 42 months by 30 days in a month, we will get 1260 again.

By comparing the three different expressions of 1260;  $3\frac{1}{2}$  times and 42 months, we are able to work out the correlation of 360 days for a prophetic year and 30 days for a prophetic month. Thus we do not need to go to extra-biblical material to understand the common time period.

We really have the same time period being spoken of, whether it is in terms of 42 months, 1260 days or three-and-a-half prophetic years.

Daniel 7:25, 26 talks of the little horn power rising out of the break-up of the Roman Empire. Then it carries on for the time period described, which seems to stretch over many centuries, until we come to the time when God's people inherit the kingdom.

Many scholars have long recognised we cannot be dealing with 1260 literal days or three-and-a-half literal years. If that were the case, the prophecy does not correspond with anything we can see in history.

### Why prophetic days are not normal days

There are good reasons why prophetic “days” are not to be considered normal days. Here are some of them:

1. By using symbols God is protecting His church—2000 years is a long while for Christians to wait for the end.
2. Because this time period is also mentioned in Daniel 7:25 we understand that this horn power comes out of the Roman Empire’s break up and endures until the time of the judgment at the end-time.
3. Elsewhere in the Bible, God has used the symbolism of one day to represent one year (see Ezekiel 4:6 and Numbers 14:35). This does not require that other places in the Bible may be understood the in the same manner. However, it does show the concept is not foreign to the Bible .
4. Daniel 8:14 talks of 2300 evenings and mornings—or days—but then states that the prophecy is to be fulfilled in the time of the end (see verse 17) which, according to Daniel 11:40 to 12:4, is a term for the end-time and the resurrection of God’s people. Thus if the term is not understood as meaning a longer period of time than 2300 literal days we would find the prophecy failed.
5. Daniel 9:24-27 talks of “weeks of years.” This means that one week of years is 7 years. This prophecy was remarkably fulfilled in the ministry of Christ. Again we see that the year-day concept was not a foreign concept in the Bible itself.

### Putting the pieces together

In the prophecy of Revelation 12, there is:

- The ascension of Christ (verse 5)
- The 1260 days (verse 6), and
- Finally, the end-time crisis when the followers of Christ face the full fury of the dragon (verse 17).

Therefore, the 1260 days belongs to the period that stretches from after the ascension of Christ to the end-time conflict between the dragon and the woman who will face the full wrath of the dragon (see Revelation 13).

It is obvious that the middle time period refers to a “Dark Ages” that lasted more than 1000 years. During this time, true followers of Christ faced difficult times by way of persecution.

A series of events led to the rise of the medieval church in Europe, where it was often able to dominate the Christian world: this happened off and on for more than 1000 years. These events may be summarised as follows:

1. Rome was the capital of the empire and the civilized world. It was the natural place for the headquarters of a world church. The church in Rome was able to successfully resist the heresies of Gnosticism and Montanism and was seen by many as a centre of orthodox Christian belief. Other church centres began to appeal to the Bishop of Rome for help in fighting heresies.
2. The church in Rome was left free of political control after the Emperor Constantine made a new capital for the empire in Constantinople. The vacuum left by Constantine was filled by the Bishop of Rome. Later, the church in the east suffered Islamic invasion, which eliminated the main rival to the Roman church.

3. Emperor Justinian—a strong supporter of the church in Rome—issued a decree that the Bishop of Rome (the Pope) was supreme ruler over all the Christian churches in the east and west of the empire. The decree did not become effective until 538 when the Ostrogoths (political enemies of the church in Rome) were forced to lift their siege of Rome. Some would see this date as the beginning of the 1260-year period.

### Conclusions drawn from historical proof

Over the centuries, the power of the church at Rome had a checkered career as the bishop had running battles with various emperors, sometimes coming out on top and sometimes being humiliated.

During the pontificate of Innocent III (1216) the Roman church was at its height of power which continued for another century. There followed a time of waning power, climaxing in what is often called the “Babylonian Captivity” (1309-77) when the French forcibly removed the papacy from Rome to Avignon in France.

Soon after the papacy’s return to Rome, there came a period known as the Great Schism (1378-1417) when there were at least two and sometimes three rival popes denouncing each other. This resulted in a loss of prestige in the population and many voices within and outside of the Roman church called for a reformation of the church.

There were other important historical events that helped end the political power of the bishop of Rome:

- The Renaissance commencing in the 14th century.
- The Reformation in the 16th century.
- The Enlightenment, which led to an age of religious scepticism.
- The French Revolution basically declared war on the church in Rome. For many centuries, France had championed the claims of the bishop of Rome and used its armies to support him and crush his enemies, but now this power turned against him. In 1798, Napoleon ordered General Berthier to take the Pope prisoner. Many see this date as the end of the 1260 years referred to in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

The decline in political power continued as changing conditions emerged:

- Separation of church and state began to take hold in Europe and elsewhere,
- Democracy spread around the civilised world, and
- Secular societies began to emerge.

As with many historical, political and social trends, no dates can be given to mark a sharp beginning and ending of the rise and fall: these developments were gradual.

However, the dates 538 (Pope declared supreme ruler of Christian churches) and 1798 (Pope imprisoned) fit the 1260-year period as given in this prophecy in a remarkable manner.