

# The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

*A Controversial Newsletter "The Printed Voice of Summit Theological Seminary"*

~ All articles written by Terry Carter unless otherwise stated ~

Vol. 38 No. 2

April 2025

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## The Year-Day Theory

It is virtually impossible to study the book of Daniel without addressing the year-day (or day-year) theory. Simply stated, this is the idea that a day in prophecy represents, or corresponds to, a year in its fulfillment. While this is a very controversial topic, whether you accept this as a valid approach to prophecy or not will have an immense influence on your understanding of Daniel and Biblical prophecy in general.

There are some who reject this approach entirely. Others try to apply it to almost every prophetic passage that gives a time frame for its fulfillment. Finally, there are those who view this as a valid approach in some passages, but not in others. One author said that it is a prophetic key that should be used only where it fits and not where it does not.

It is certainly true that the year-day theory has been misused and abused. The culprits are some of the worst offenders in this area. Those who oppose the year-day theory are quick to point out these facts, and rightly so. However, the abuse of a principle or theory does not rule out the proper use of it. Furthermore, the use of a theory by people of dubious character does not indicate that it cannot be properly used by those who are much more reasoned in their

approach. Often a valuable tool can be improperly used by incompetent people. That does not make the tool worthless.

It also needs to be pointed out that virtually all students of prophecy understand the seventy weeks of Daniel chapter nine to be symbolic of 490 years. Some come to this conclusion based on the year-day theory. Those who reject the year-day theory come to the same conclusion but do so on a different basis. They point out that the original language would be better translated "seventy sevens" rather than "seventy weeks". The original word is not specific to weeks; it can refer to seventy periods of seven which could mean seven weeks, months, years, or even decades. They refer to this as "seventy heptads".

While this is certainly true, it also indicates the flexibility and ambiguity of the original language here. Ultimately, they understand that the prophecy that Daniel gives in chapter nine was fulfilled over a 490-year period. Therefore, they understand this passage to be speaking of seventy periods of seven years. It is the fulfillment that makes the understanding clear. While those who hold to the year-day theory may come to this conclusion from a different direction, their approach is not so different. They also understand that

the fulfillment happened over a period of 490 years. Therefore, they understand the seventy "weeks" (490 days) to represent 490 years. For both groups, the fulfillment leads to the conclusion. What differs is the explanation as to why that conclusion is correct. One explains it via the flexibility of the original language, the other by applying the year-day theory.

When trying to justify the year-day theory, people often point to **Numbers 14:34**.

"According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, **for each day you shall bear your guilt one year**, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection." **Numbers 14:34 (NKJV)**

In that passage, the Israelites are condemned to wander in the wilderness for forty years because of their refusal to enter and conquer the land of Canaan. The spies had searched out the land for forty days, so God told them that they would wander the wilderness for forty years, a year for every day the spies did their work.

This is certainly not a strong argument for the year-day principle in prophecy, as those who reject it have pointed out. This is not a prophetic, or even a symbolic, passage of Scripture. There is really no reason to

generalize a principle for approaching prophecy from this.

Another passage that is used to justify the year-day theory is **Ezekiel 4:4-6**. This is a much different passage than the one in Numbers. This is a symbolic passage. God told Ezekiel to lay on his left side for 390 days and then on his right side for forty days. This was to represent the iniquity of Israel and Judah respectively, a day for each year of their iniquity.

“4 Lie also on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it. According to the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their iniquity. 5 **For I have laid on you the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days**, three hundred and ninety days; so you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. 6 “And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. **I have laid on you a day for each year.**” **Ezekiel 4:4-6 (NKJV)**

Critics of the year-day theory argue that it is not sensible to conclude from this that we should take a year to represent a day in prophecy as a universal, or even general, rule. I would agree with this statement, but I think there is more to be said here. While this does not justify a universal, or even a general, rule for understanding prophecy, it does indicate that a day can represent a year in prophecy. The question is whether this is the only instance of such a thing or are there others. Here, God has shown us the key that unlocks this passage. It certainly does not justify the idea that this key unlocks any and every passage, but we must ask whether this key unlocks other passages. If so, how can we know when to use this key and when not to use it.

When I was in high school algebra, we learned the quadratic formula. It is a very useful formula for solving

certain kinds of equations; however, it cannot be used to solve every equation. Part of learning about the quadratic formula was learning when to use it and when not to use it. The same goes for any principle of interpreting prophecy or even Scripture in general. Not every tool works for every passage. You must learn how, and when, to use each tool.

Pointing out that poor students have used the quadratic formula incorrectly or when it was not appropriate does not invalidate the formula or its usefulness when used appropriately and properly. To point out the abuse of the year-day theory is fine, but that does not invalidate the whole idea. Pointing out that it has been used by poor students of Scripture does not invalidate it as a tool to be used properly and when it is appropriate.

While the year-day theory is not something that should be applied to every prophetic passage, or even any particular one, it can be a useful tool when used properly and in passages where it is appropriate. It is a key that will not open every lock but only the ones it was intended to open. Unfortunately, when a key is used on the wrong lock, especially when it is forced, it can destroy both the lock and the key. This is what happens when the year-day theory is forced upon the wrong passage of Scripture. It destroys the meaning of that passage and prevents the proper use of that key elsewhere.

Certainly, the year-day theory should not be used on literal passages of Scripture. Even in prophetic passages, the literal meaning should be considered first. Further, the year-day theory should never be forced on any passage of Scripture. Finally, just like in math class, you need to “check your answer”. That is, we need to ask whether the application of the year-day theory results in reasonable conclusions. If not, it should not be used for that passage. However, if

and when the year-day theory verifies reasonable conclusions obtained by other means, it might just be the right key to that passage.

**Note:** The previous article is an excerpt from *Daniel* by Terry Carter.