

# The Prophetic Year

by Sir Robert Anderson

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*The prophetic year is a year of 360 days, which is different from the Julian year, and is used in the Bible to describe a period of time that is significant for the fulfillment of prophecy.*

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 36:21, Isaiah 1:1, Jeremiah 27:13, Ezekiel 24:1, Daniel 9:24, Haggai 2:10, Revelation 11:2, Revelation 12:6, Revelation 13:5

**Topics:** "Biblical Prophecy", "Eschatology"

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## Description

Sir Robert Anderson delves into the intricate details of the prophetic era in the Bible, exploring the significance of 'weeks' in Jewish culture and the measurement of time in relation to historical events. He discusses the lunar-based Jewish year of 360 days, the Sabbatical year, and the era of the 'desolations' as a period of seventy years. Anderson also examines the division of the prophetic era into two periods, highlighting the role of the Messiah and a prince in the timeline of events leading to persecution and Divine blessings.

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## Transcript

IN English ears it must sound pedantic to speak of "weeks" in any other than the familiar acceptance of the term. But with the Jew it was far otherwise. The effect of his laws was fitted "to render the word week capable of meaning a seven of years almost as naturally as a seven of days. Indeed the generality of the word would have this effect at any rate. Hence its use to denote the latter in prophecy is not mere arbitrary symbolism, but the employment of a not unfamiliar and easily understood language." [1]

1. Smith's Bib. Dict., III., 1726, "Week." Greek and Latin philosophers too have known of 'weeks of years.' - PUSEY, Daniel, p. 167.

Daniel's prayer referred to seventy years fulfilled: the prophecy which came in answer to that prayer foretold a period of seven times seventy still to come. But here a question arises which never has received sufficient notice in the consideration of this subject. None will doubt that the era is a period of years; but of what kind of year is it composed? That the Jewish year was lunisolar appears to be reasonably certain. If tradition may be trusted, Abraham preserved in his family the year of 360 days, which he had known in his Chaldean home.[2] The month dates of the flood (150 days being specified as the interval between the seventeenth day of the second month, and the same day of the seventh month) appear to show that this form of year was the earliest known to our race. Sir Isaac Newton states, that "all nations, before the just length of the solar year was known, reckoned months by the course of the moon, and years by the return

of winter and summer, spring and autumn; and in making calendars for their festivals, they reckoned thirty days to a lunar month, and twelve lunar months to a year, taking the nearest round numbers, whence came the division of the ecliptic into 360 degrees." And in adopting this statement, Sir G. C. Lewis avers that "all credible testimony and all antecedent probability lead to the result that a solar year containing twelve lunar months, determined within certain limits of error, has been generally recognized by the nations adjoining the Mediterranean, from a remote antiquity." [3]

2. Encyc. Brit. (6th ed.), title "Chronology." See also Smith's Bib. Dict., title "Chronology," p. 314.

3. Astronomy of the Ancients, chap. 1 & 7. Are not the hundred and eighty days of the great feast of Xerxes intended to be equivalent to six months? (Esther 1:4.)

But considerations of this kind go no further than to prove how legitimate and important is the question here proposed. The inquiry remains whether any grounds exist for reversing the presumption which obtains in favor of the common civil year. Now the prophetic era is clearly seven times the seventy years of the "desolations" which were before the mind of Daniel when the prophecy was given. Is it possible then to ascertain the character of the years of this lesser era?

One of the characteristic ordinances of the Jewish law was, that every seventh year the land was to lie fallow, and it was in relation to the neglect of this ordinance that the era of the desolations was decreed. It was to last "until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths; for so long as she lay desolate, she kept Sabbath, to fulfill threescore and ten years." (2 Chronicles 36:21; cf. Leviticus 26:34, 35) The essential element in the judgment was, not a ruined city, but a land laid desolate by the terrible scourge of a hostile invasion, (Compare Jeremiah 27:13; Haggai 2:17) the effects of which were perpetuated by famine and pestilence, the continuing proofs of the Divine displeasure. It is obvious therefore, that the true epoch of the judgment is not, as has been generally assumed, the capture of Jerusalem, but the invasion of Judea. From the time the Babylonian armies entered the land, all agricultural pursuits were suspended, and therefore the desolations may be reckoned from the day the capital was invested, namely, the tenth day of the tenth month in the ninth year of Zedekiah. This was the epoch as revealed to Ezekiel the prophet in his exile on the banks of the Euphrates, (Ezekiel 24:1, 2) and for twenty-four centuries the day has been observed as a fast by the Jews in every land.

The close of the era is indicated in Scripture with equal definiteness, as "the four-and-twentieth day of the ninth month in the second year of Darius.[4] "Consider now" (the prophetic word declared) "from this day and upward - from the four-and-twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid - consider it: from this day I will bless you." Now from the tenth day of Tebeth B.C. 589,[5] to the twenty-fourth day of Chisleu B.C. 520,[6] was a period of 25, 202 days; and seventy years of 360 days contain exactly 25, 200 days. We may conclude, therefore, that the era of the "desolations" was a period of seventy years of 360 days, beginning the day after the Babylonian army invested Jerusalem, and ending the day before the foundation of the second temple was laid.[7]

4. Haggai. 2:10, 15-19. The books of Haggai and Zechariah give in full the prophetic utterances which the narrative of Ezra (4:24; 5:1-5) mentions as the sanction and incentive under which the Jews returned to the work of setting up their temple.

5. The ninth year of Zedekiah. See App. 1. post.

6. The second year of Darius Hystaspes.

7. The date of the Paschal new moon, by which the Jewish year is regulated, was the evening of the 14th March in B. C. 589, and about noon on 1st April B. C. 520. According to the phases the 1st Nisan in the former year was probably the 15th or 16th March, and in the latter the 1st or 2nd April.

But this inquiry may be pressed still further. As the era of the "desolations" was fixed at seventy years, because of the neglect of the Sabbatic years, (2 Chronicles 36:21; Leviticus 26:34, 35) we might expect to find that a period of seven times seventy years measured back from the close of the seventy years of "indignation against Judah," would bring us to the time when Israel entered into their full national privileges, and thus incurred their full responsibilities. And such in fact will be found upon inquiry to be the case. From the year succeeding the dedication of Solomon's temple, to the year before the foundation of the second temple was laid, was a period of 490 years of 360 days.[8]

8. The temple was dedicated in the eleventh year of Solomon, and the second temple was founded in B. C. 520. The intervening period reckoned exclusively was 483 years = 490 lunisolar years of 360 days. It is noteworthy that the interval between the dedication of Solomon's temple and the dedication of the second temple (B. C. 515) was 490 years. A like period had elapsed between the entrance into Canaan and the foundation of the kingdom under Saul. These cycles of 70, and multiples of 70, in Hebrew history are striking and interesting. See App. 1.

It must be admitted, however, that no argument based on calculations of this kind is final.[9] The only data which would warrant our deciding unreservedly that the prophetic year consists of 360 days, would be to find some portion of the era subdivided into the days of which it is composed. No other proof can be wholly satisfactory, but if this be forthcoming, it must be absolute and conclusive. And this is precisely what the book of the Revelation gives us.

9. Though it is signally confirmed by the undoubted fact that the Jewish Sabbatical year was conterminous, not with the solar, but with the ecclesiastical year.

As already noticed, the prophetic era is divided into two periods, the one of 7+ 62 heptades, the other of a single heptade.[10] Connected with these eras, two "princes" are prominently mentioned; first, the Messiah, and secondly, a prince of that people by whom Jerusalem was to be destroyed, - a personage of such pre-eminence, that on his advent his identity is to be as certain as that of Christ Himself. The first era closes with the "cutting off" of Messiah; the beginning of the second era dates from the signature of a "covenant," or treaty, by this second "prince," with or perhaps in favor of "the many,"[11] that is the Jewish nation, as distinguished probably from a section of pious persons among them who will stand aloof. In the middle of the heptade the treaty is to be violated by the suppression of the Jews' religion, and a time of persecution is to follow.

10. The division of the 69 weeks into 7 +62 is accounted for by the fact that the first 49 years, during which the restoration of Jerusalem was completed, ended with a great crisis in Jewish history, the close of the prophetic testimony. Forty-nine years from B. C. 445 brings us to the date of Malachi's prophecy.

11. "The multitude." - TREGELLES, Daniel, p. 97.

Daniel's vision of the four beasts affords a striking commentary upon this. The identity of the fourth beast with the Roman empire is not doubtful, and we read that a "king" is to arise, territorially connected with that empire, but historically belonging to a later time; he will be a persecutor of "the saints of the Most High," and his fall is to be immediately followed by the fulfillment of Divine blessings upon the favored people -

the precise event which marks the close of the "seventy weeks." The duration of that persecution, moreover, is stated to be "a time and times, and the dividing of time," - a mystical expression, of which the meaning might be doubtful, were it not that it is used again in Scripture as synonymous with three and a half years, or half a prophetic week. (Revelation 12:6, 14) Now there can be no reasonable doubt of the identity of the king of Daniel 7:25 with the first "beast" of the thirteenth chapter of Revelation. In the Revelation he is likened to a leopard, a bear, and a lion, - the figures used for Daniel's three first beasts. In Daniel there are ten kingdoms, represented by ten horns. So also in Revelation. According to Daniel, "he shall speak great words against the Most High, and wear out the saints of the Most High": according to Revelation, "he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God," "and it was given unto him to make war with the saints and to overcome them." According to Daniel, "they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time," or three and a half years: according to Revelation, "power was given unto him to continue forty and two months."

It is not impossible, of course, that prophecy may foretell the career of two different men, answering the same description, who will pursue a precisely similar course in similar circumstances for a similar period of three and a half years; but the more natural and obvious supposition is that the two are identical. Owing to the very nature of the subject, their identity cannot be logically demonstrated, but it rests upon precisely the same kind of proof upon which juries convict men of crimes, and convicted prisoners are punished.

Now this seventieth week is admittedly a period of seven years, and half of this period is three times described as "a time, times, and half a time," or "the dividing of a time;" (Daniel 7:25; 12:7; Revelation 12:14) twice as forty-two months; (Revelation 11:2; 13:5) and twice as 1, 260 days. (Revelation 11:3; 12:6) But 1, 260 days are exactly equal to forty-two months of thirty days, or three and a half years of 360 days, whereas three and a half Julian years contain 1, 278 days. It follows therefore that the prophetic year is not the Julian year, but the ancient year of 360 days.[12]

12. It is noteworthy that the prophecy was given at Babylon, and the Babylonian year consisted of twelve months of thirty days. That the prophetic year is not the ordinary year is no new discovery. It was noticed sixteen centuries ago by Julius Africanus in his Chronography, wherein he explains the seventy weeks to be weeks of Jewish (lunar) years, beginning with the twentieth of Artaxerxes, the fourth year of the 83rd Olympiad, and ending in the second year of the 202nd Olympiad; 475 Julian years being equal to 490 lunar years.

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