

Dan 12:5-13: Further Thoughts

Frank W. Hardy, Ph.D.

How Does the Text Divide into Groups?

Verses 1-4

The angel's narrative begins with an aside to Daniel (11:2a) and ends with an aside to Daniel (12:4). These two seemingly irrelevant clauses where the angel addresses Daniel directly have great significance, because they form an inclusio around the prophecy showing exactly where it begins and ends. This is useful information. If 11:2a and 12:4 are what form this inclusio, then the prophecy itself consists of Dan 11:2b-12:3. Thus, Dan 12:1-4 provides an epilogue to 11:40-45 and is separate from the rest of its chapter.

Verses 5-13

By contrast, in vs. 5 Daniel is the one speaking (or writing). Regardless what he says there, the verse is important because Daniel is the one saying it. This stands in contrast with Dan 11:2b-12:3, and with 11:2a and 12:4 where the angel addresses Daniel directly. Throughout the prophecy Daniel remains salient. Now he speaks (or writes). So 12:5 clearly marks a break with what has gone before. He refers to the river he had seen in chap. 10 and to the "[M]an clothed in linen," also from chap. 10.

When we say that Dan 10 introduces the prophecy and that Dan 12 concludes the prophecy, with chap. 11 in the middle, what we mean is something along the following lines:

Dan 10:1-11:1	Introduction
Dan 10:2a	Aside to Daniel
Dan 11:2b-12:3	Prophetic narrative
Dan 12:4	Aside to Daniel
Dan 12:5-13	Conclusion

Verses 8-10 in relation to 6-7, 11-12

What Daniel asks in vs. 8 is not part of what the angel had been telling him. Here there is another break. What Daniel says in vs. 8 is a parenthesis – an interruption. There is a question where the angel's response ends and where his original thought resumes. We can only know when the angel resumes his thought by knowing what he was talking about before. He was talking about time periods in vss. 6-7. So when he returns to the matter of time periods in vss. 11-12, that's a resumption of his thought. This point is emphasized by the fact that vss. 10 and 11 have no obvious connection with each other. the transition at vs. 11 is quite abrupt.

Do vss. 8-10 have any literary unity of their own? Yes! Daniel begins by saying he does not understand, and understanding is the theme of the section. The angel tells him, it's true that you don't understand what I've just said. There's no way you could, because it's not the time of the end yet. More than this, some will never understand, but those who are wise eventually will – during the time of the end. This is not to say that the "time, times and half a time" will occur during the time of the end, but that it would not be understood until all the events referred to had

occurred. Thus, vss. 6-7 and 11-12 share a common theme (time periods) and vss. 8-10 share a different and contrasting theme (understanding).

My point in saying all of this is that the three time periods belong together exegetically. They are separated by a parenthesis, but not by some great barrier. There is no justification for separating them from each other exegetically so that one set of principles of interpretation are require here and another different set are required there.

Concerning the Time Periods

The numbers (1290, 1335) argue for a symbolic interpretation and the word "days" fails to support a literal interpretation.

The word "days"

In regard to the angel's use of the word "days" in vss. 11-12, some argue that we must use a different principle of interpretation for the 1290 and 1335 days than we use for the "time, times and half a time" in vs. 7. Why? I grant that "days" is not a poetic reference to time. But is "weeks" a poetic reference to time in chap. 9? Table 1 contains two unrelated lists of terms.

Table 1
Summary of Time References

Ref	Poetic	Ref	Non-Poetic
Dan 7:25	Time, times and half a time	Dan 9:24	Weeks
Dan 8:14	Evening- mornings	Dan 12:11	1290 days
Dan 11:24	A time	Dan 12:12	1335 days
Dan 12:7	Time, times and half a time		

If all non-poetic references to time in the book of Daniel must be understood literally, how shall we interpret the seventy weeks? If we start equating non-poetic with literal in Dan 12, we are starting down a slippery slope by the time we get back to Dan 9, because applying the same principles of interpretation to chaps. 8 and 9 has made Seventh-day Adventism what it is.

There is no need to interpret the 1290 and 1335 days literally on the basis that "days" sounds less symbolic than "times" or whatever. When we compare these verses with what John says in Revelation, it is clear that "a half, times and half a time" (=years), "42 months," and "1260 days" are all merely spelling variants of each other.

If "1260 days" is one of those spelling variants, that does not sound so very different from "1290 days" or "1335 days." All of these time references should be understood using the same principles of interpretation and they can all be reasonably applied to overlapping periods during the Middle Ages – just as Seventh-day Adventists have always done up to now.

The numbers 1290 and 1335

If the 1290 and 1335 days are to be interpreted literally, in future time, then that literal interpretation should map well onto a modern calendar current at the time of application. It does not. The numbers 1290 and 1335 (as well as 1260) are artificially clean when divided by 30.

Assuming a month that is always made up of 30 days, 1290 days is three years, seven months, while 1335 days is three years eight and a half months.

The problem is that literal time must map onto a literal calendar, and if the periods apply in the future that would have to be a modern calendar. But on a modern calendar the month is 30 days long only four times a year (April, June, September, November), with no two 30-day months next to each other. Thirty days per month does not represent a literal lunar cycle (it is approximately two days too long), and 360 days does not represent a literal solar cycle (it is approximately five days too short).

Then there is the question of leap years, which with a period approaching four years could well be a factor. Any attempt to apply periods that are so evenly divisible by 30 onto a modern calendar produces results that are ragged and unconvincing. Thus, if the periods began on the first of this month (Tuesday 08/01/2006) they would end on Wednesday 02/10/2010 and Saturday 03/27/2010 respective. If they began today (Wednesday 08/09/2006) they would end on Thursday 02/18/2010 and Sunday 04/04/2010 respectively. When mapped onto a modern calendar the dates have no obvious pattern. It is not impossible to count time this way, but no one would claim that the result is especially elegant.

Connecting the Prophetic Time Periods

By contrast, if the 1290 and 1335 day periods are stated within their own context and interpreted in a manner consistent with the 1260 days (42 months; time, times and half a time), the result is both balanced and cohesive. See fig. 1.

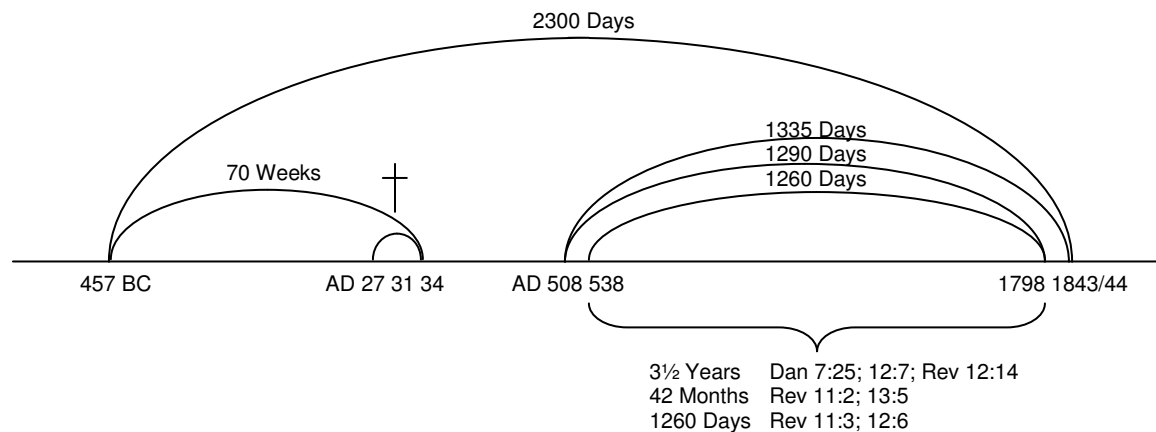


Fig. 1. Five major prophetic time periods drawn to approximate scale, where the 1290 days and 1335 days are taken together with the rest.

If someone wishes to separate either the 1290 and 1335 by themselves, or the 1260, 1290, and 1335 as a group, it is fair to ask what this would look like when drawn to scale. Again, what is missing is balance, proportion, elegance. See fig. 2.

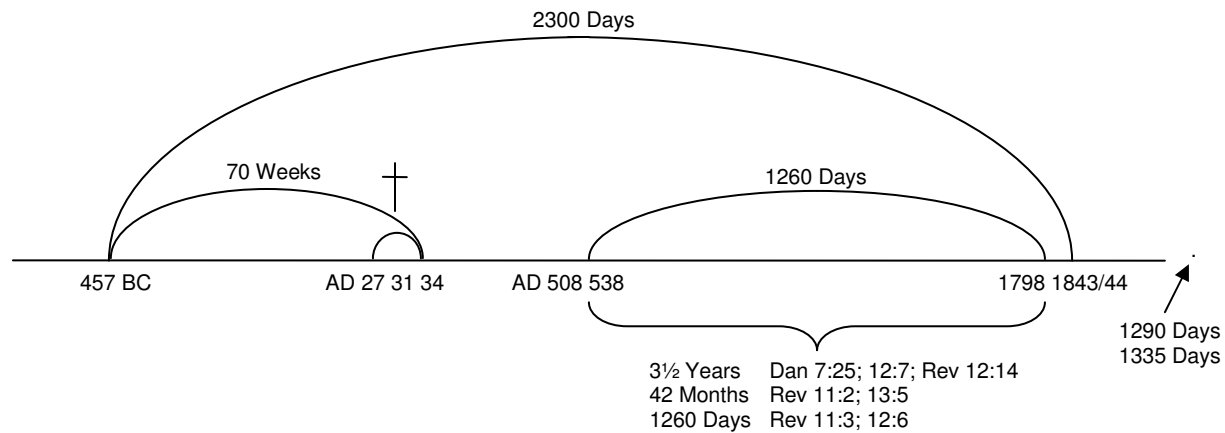


Fig. 2. Five major prophetic time periods drawn to approximate scale, where the 1290 days and 1335 days are separated from the other periods and interpreted using literal rather than prophetic time.

In fig. 2 notice that the 1260 days are no longer anchored in time with respect to the 2300 days. One reason for the existence of the 1290 and 1335 days time periods is to lock the 1260 days in place so they are not just any period of 1260 days (=years), but one unique period that cannot be moved either forward or back. In fig. 2 they could potentially be moved. The controls that would otherwise prevent this have been removed. I see this as a problem.

Another different kind of problem arises when we move the 1260 days off the chart, along with the 1290 and 1335 days, such that all three periods take place in the time of the end. In this case there is no way to define the time of the end. Seventh-day Adventists have always identified the beginning of this period with the end of the 1260 days in 1798. But if the 1260 days do not end in 1798 (if they are still future), then we can't use them as a basis for knowing when the time of the end begins. There might be some other criterion we can use, but looking for it takes us one more step away from historic Adventism.

If one were to move the 1260 days off the chart, while also leaving it on the chart – producing a double interpretation, it would be fair to demand that the 1290 and 1335 days have a double interpretation as well. Some interpreters might be willing to do this. Is there any other case where a time prophecy applies twice? And if so, why should it not apply three times? Good method will help us to avoid bad results like these. If we have the right method, we will get the right results and will get them for the right reasons.

Allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture has a unifying effect. It brings passages together. An example of this is comparing the superficially different time periods of "a time, times and half a time" (Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 12:14), "42 months" (Rev 11:2; 13:5),¹ and "1,260 days" (Rev 11:3; 12:6) and seeing that all seven references have in view the same period of historical time. Interpreting the "1,290 days" (Dan 12:11) and the "1,335 days" (Dan 12:12) in a way that is fundamentally different from the "time, times and half a time" (Dan 12:7) only a few verses earlier is not what I mean by bringing Scripture together. We must allow the Holy Spirit to speak with one voice. When we do we can be sure we are hearing Him correctly.

¹ The number is spelled out as "forty-two months" in Rev 13:5.