

The book of Daniel, completed sometime after 537 B.C., is one of my favorite books in the Bible (I have about ten favorite books!). Daniel was a unique prophet. Because his prophecies about coming world empires were so accurately fulfilled in history, modern critics claim the book was written in the mid-second century B.C., after the many detailed events took place. This is obviously not true. But it shows the precision of his prophetic dreams and visions.

In this session and the next, we are going to look in-depth at the book of Daniel. What you will see is God has a six-fold purpose for the nation of Israel and the Jewish people (Dan. 9:24), which is accomplished during a divine timetable of 490 years (Dan. 9:24). This multifaceted purpose is executed by four worldwide empires (Dan. 2, 7), which God has used and will use to refine, purify, purge, prepare, and judge Israel and the Jewish people. But make no mistake about it—Daniel’s prophecy not only relates to Israel, but it will dramatically affect us, who live at the end of the age. The Apostle Matthew even commanded us to read and understand Daniel’s prophecy (Matt. 24:15).

To get started, I will share the key to understanding the book of Daniel, a segment of the book of Revelation (Rev. 11:1-14; 12:1-18; 13:1-18; 17:1-18:24), the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, and Paul’s end-time teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2. This key is Daniel’s Seventy-Week Prophecy, which some scholars believe is *the backbone of end-time prophecy*. The angel Gabriel revealed this key to Daniel while he was praying for the Jews in Babylonian captivity.

Seventy-Weeks Decreed for Israel

The year was around 539 B.C. For almost seventy years, the Jewish people were exiled in the land of Babylon. God had given the Jews into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar in order to discipline them for breaking the Law and rejecting the Prophets. Nebuchadnezzar, a ruthless dictator, had ransacked Jerusalem and taken God’s chosen people as prisoners of war.

As a captive in the land of Babylon, God exalted Daniel and made him one of the most powerful men in the world (Dan. 2:48). Few have experienced God’s favor and anointing resting upon them like Daniel. Nevertheless, the secret to Daniel’s success was his devotion to prayer. Every day—three times a day—Daniel would enter his house and open his windows toward Jerusalem. Then he would kneel down and pour out his heart before God. Daniel prayed like this throughout his entire life.

One day, while reading the prophecies of Jeremiah, Daniel reflected upon God’s promise to release the Jews from Babylonian captivity after seventy years and bring them back to Israel (Jer. 29:10-11). Why seventy years? In the Law, God commanded the Israelites to let the land rest every seventh year (Lev. 25:4-5, 27-46). This meant no sowing in the fields and no pruning the vineyards. Because the Jewish people likely disobeyed this commandment for at least 70 sabbath years (totaling 490 years), God decreed their captivity to last 70 years, which allowed the land to rest for all the years of Israel’s disobedience (2 Chron. 36:21; Jer. 34:12-22). These two numbers—70 and 490—have profound prophetic significance, as you will see in a minute.

Daniel, realizing the time of prophetic fulfillment was at hand, gave himself to fervent prayer for the Jewish people, the city of Jerusalem, and the temple. Deep from his heart, Daniel repented, pleaded, and petitioned the Lord for the restoration of Israel.

While Daniel poured himself out in intercession, the angel Gabriel came to him and gave him one of the most profound prophecies in Scripture. Gabriel told him, “Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place” (Dan. 9:24).

Pay close attention to the phrase: “Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city.”

The Hebrew word for *weeks* is *shabuwa`*. This word can mean a *period of seven*, such as *seven days* or *seven years*.¹ For example, Laban told Jacob, “Complete the week [*shabuwa`*] of this one, and we will give you the other also for the service which you shall serve with me for *another seven years*” (Gen. 29:27, emphasis mine). Clearly, this verse shows *shabuwa`* can mean a period of seven years.

To Gentiles unfamiliar with the Torah, this language is a bit mysterious. Why did the Lord give such a cryptic prophecy, speaking of a period of 70 sets of seven? In this prophecy, does this mean 70 sets of seven days or 70 sets of seven years?

To Daniel and the Jews of his day, this was no mystery at all. It was a clear reference to the *shemithah*, the sabbath year or sabbatical year, when the Lord commanded the land to rest. As previously mentioned, the Jews were exiled for seventy years so the land could experience the seventy shemithahs it missed over a 490-year period. This is why Gabriel told Daniel seventy periods of seven years have been decreed for your people.

Most scholars agree *weeks* in this passage refers to a period of seven years. Thus, there are 70 seven-year periods, or 490 years, for God’s prophetic plans for Israel to be accomplished. With all of this in mind, we could paraphrase it like this: “490 years have been decreed for your people and your holy city.”

Now that we know the timeframe, notice this prophecy refers to “your people and your holy city . . . to anoint the most holy place” (Dan. 9:24). Daniel’s Seventy-Week Prophecy, as titled by many scholars, is like a prophetic calendar detailing God’s agenda for the Jewish people, the city of Jerusalem, and their temple. This is a vital key to interpreting the book of Daniel and even the book of Revelation. This key also helps unlock the mystery of the four world empires in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7. More on that in the next session.

The Purpose of Daniel 9:24-27

Let’s look now at the purpose of this prophecy, how it has been fulfilled throughout history, and what remains to be fulfilled.

First, the purpose of this prophecy. Gabriel told Daniel the purpose was “to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place” (Dan. 9:24).

To finish the transgression and *to make an end of sin* refer to bringing Israel’s rebellion and sins against God to finality. This will be completed at the end of the age, in what Jeremiah referred to as *Jacob’s Trouble* (Jer. 30:7, NKJV). This will be the most trying time in Israel’s history. During this time, the Lord will wash away, once-and-for-all, “the filth of the daughters of Zion” and will purge “the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning” (Isa. 4:4).

To make atonement for iniquity undoubtedly refers to Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross. His blood sacrifice ended the requirement for animal sacrifices, which only provided temporary forgiveness. Now that Christ has shed His blood on the cross, all who call upon His name—both Jew and Gentile—can experience eternal atonement for their iniquity.

To bring in everlasting righteousness is a major part of God’s end-time plan for Israel. Everyone in Jerusalem and Israel who survives *Jacob’s Trouble* will “be called holy—everyone who is recorded for life in Jerusalem” (Isa. 4:3). When this fiery work is finished, Jerusalem “will be called the city of righteousness, a faithful city” (Isa. 1:26). Because the Lord Jesus Himself will rule and reign from Jerusalem, Israel’s righteousness will go “forth like brightness” to the nations (Isa. 62:1). As a result, “the nations will see” Israel’s “righteousness” and stream to the holy city, seeking the Lord (Isa. 62:2).

To seal up vision and prophecy means the Lord will bring to completion every prophetic promise spoken to Israel by God’s prophets, such as Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Zechariah, and Malachi. Peter referred to this as the “restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets” (Acts 3:21). This will be fulfilled when Jesus returns and reigns for 1,000 years from Jerusalem (Rev. 20:6).

To anoint the most holy place refers to the Messiah (Jesus) building the Millennial Temple. After Jesus returns, destroys His enemies and judges the nations, He will construct a new temple.² Zechariah prophesied, “Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the Lord” (Zech. 6:12). From this Millennial Temple, the glory of Christ will radiate to the nations, covering the earth with the glory of the Lord (Hab. 2:14).

When Did Daniel’s 70-Week Prophecy Begin?

Gabriel continued his prophecy, stating, “You are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress” (Dan. 9:25).

This has to be one of the most amazing, stunning prophecies in Scripture. In essence, Gabriel said Israel’s prophetic clock would begin ticking toward fulfillment when “a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem”

was given. From this decree until Messiah the Prince, who we know is Jesus Christ, there would be seven weeks ($7 \times 7 = 49$ years) and sixty-two weeks ($62 \times 7 = 434$ years), totaling 483 years.

When did this decree to rebuild Jerusalem take place? There are three possible options.

The first decree was given by King Cyrus, king of the Persian Empire, in 539 B.C. This decree can be quickly dismissed, however, since it only authorized the Jews to rebuild the temple—not the city of Jerusalem (2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-2; 6:3; 5:17-6:11).

The second decree was given by Persian King Artaxerxes to Ezra in 457 B.C. Once again, this decree pertained to rebuilding the temple rather than the city of Jerusalem (Ezra 7:11-26). Some argue this decree did give Ezra and the Jews authority to rebuild the city walls (Ezra 4:12, 21; 9:9). But upon closer examination, there’s a better option.

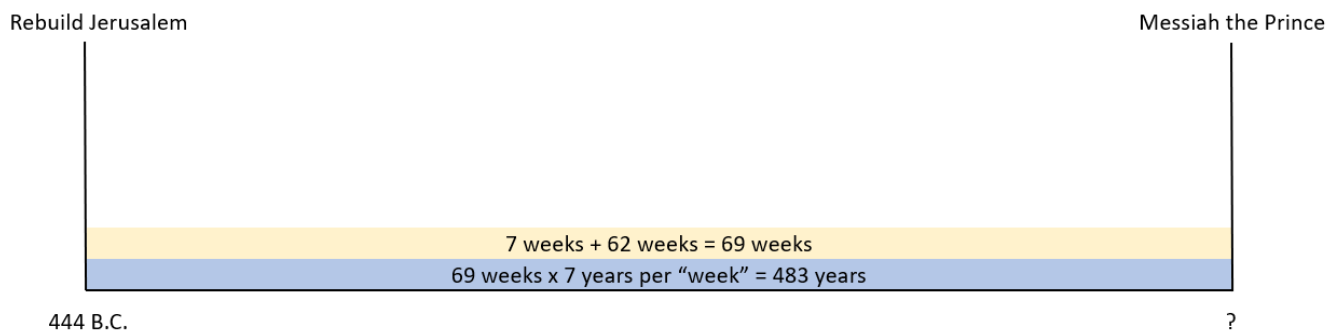
The third decree was also given by Artaxerxes in 444 B.C., but this time, it was given to Nehemiah. This decree clearly gave the Jews authority to rebuild Jerusalem (Neh. 2:5-8). For this reason, Artaxerxes’ decree in 444 B.C. is the best choice for when Daniel’s 70-Week Prophecy began.

Rebuilding Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince

Recall Gabriel’s promise that “from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks” (Dan. 9:25). If you don’t enjoy math, please hang in here for a second as I detail one of the most astounding prophecies in history. This prophecy not only predicted the coming of the Messiah but the exact time when He would be in Israel. For those who question whether Jesus is the Messiah, this prophecy should dispel all doubts.

Let’s get started. First, there are 7 weeks and 62 weeks between the decree to rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince. This equals 69 weeks. When you convert *weeks* to 7-year periods, this gives 483 years ($69 \text{ weeks} \times 7 \text{ years}$). That means, over 500 years in advance, God told us there would be 483 years between the decree to rebuild Jerusalem in 444 B.C. and the Messiah’s appearance to Israel. This is summarized below.

Rebuild Jerusalem to Messiah the Prince



Now, let’s determine the year when Messiah the Prince appeared to Israel. To do this, we have to solve a slight problem. The year 444 B.C. is in the Gregorian calendar, which is based on solar days, having 365.24219879 days in a year. On the other hand, the 483 years are biblical years, and comparing several Scriptures, we see that a biblical year contains 30 days per month or 360 days per year.³ This means 483 biblical years equates to 173,880 biblical days. This is summarized below.

Calculation of Daniel’s 69 Weeks

$$\begin{array}{r}
 69 \text{ weeks} \\
 \times 7 \text{ years per "week"} \\
 \hline
 483 \text{ biblical years}
 \end{array}
 \quad \rightarrow \quad
 \begin{array}{r}
 483 \text{ biblical years} \\
 \times 360 \text{ biblical days/year} \\
 \hline
 173,880 \text{ biblical days}
 \end{array}$$

Next, we need to convert the biblical days to solar years so we can add these years to 444 B.C. To do this, we will divide 173,880 by 365.24219879, which is the number of solar days in a year. This gives us 476 years plus 25 days. This is summarized below.

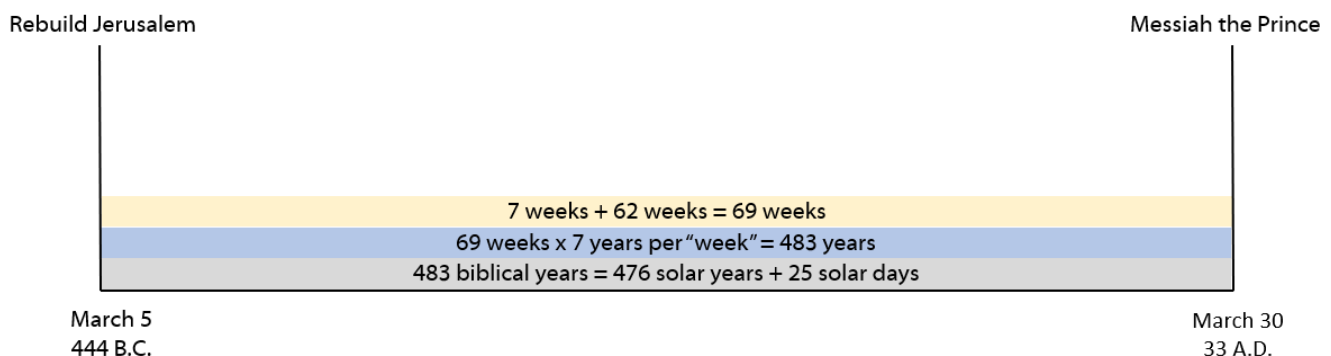
Daniel’s 69 Weeks to Solar Years

$$\frac{173,880 \text{ biblical days}}{365.24219879 \text{ solar days/year}} = 476 \text{ solar years} + 24.7 \text{ solar days}$$

Finally, when you add 476 years and 25 days to 444 B.C., it brings you to the year 33 A.D., the year when many scholars believe Jesus Christ was crucified.

Harold Hoehner, in his excellent book *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, takes the exact date of Artaxerxes’ decree on March 5, 444 B.C., does the math we just did, and arrives at March 30, 33 A.D., when Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.⁴ This is when Israel acknowledged Jesus as Messiah. A few days later, as Hoehner details, Jesus was crucified on April 3, 33 A.D. If you want a deep dive into the details of this prophecy and proof of the date Jesus was crucified, I highly recommend Hoehner’s book. If you would prefer reading an online article, see the *Prophecy of Daniel’s Seventy Weeks – Daniel 9:24-25*.⁵

Rebuild Jerusalem to Messiah the Prince



The Messiah Cut Off and Jerusalem Destroyed

As we have seen, Artaxerxes’ second decree started the prophetic clock of Daniel’s 70-Week Prophecy. For those who doubt whether Jesus is truly the Messiah, I encourage you to study this prophecy. It’s truly stunning to see how precisely God spoke over 500 years in advance and fulfilled His Word perfectly in the first coming of His Son.

Referring back to this prophecy, notice Jerusalem would be “built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress” (Dan. 9:25). This was certainly the case with Nehemiah, who faced so much opposition it forced him to deploy warriors to guard against protesters, agitators, and sudden military attack (Neh. 4:1-24).

Continuing this amazing prophecy, Gabriel stated that “after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing” (Dan. 9:26). The Hebrew word for *cut off* means *cut a covenant* and was used to describe the cutting of the animal to secure the covenant.⁶ It also means *kill*.⁷ The Hebrew word for *have nothing* can mean *not*.⁸ Thus, Gabriel said after 483 years from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, the Messiah would die as the blood sacrifice as He cut covenant. Since hindsight is 20/20, we know this is the New Covenant Jesus inaugurated by shedding His blood at Calvary. How stunning is this! The Lord told Daniel, over five-hundred years in advance, exactly when the Messiah would come and give His life as the covenant sacrifice. Wow!

In perfect fulfillment of this prophecy, 483 years after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, Jesus Christ was acknowledged as the Messiah of Israel, and a few days later, He was crucified.

At this point, we need to pause and take note that this part of the prophecy was fulfilled *when the Jews lived in the land of Israel, occupied the city of Jerusalem, and were performing sacrifices in the temple*. This will be important to remember in the next session.

Gabriel continued, stating, “The people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined” (Dan. 9:26). Several decades after the Messiah was cut off, this part of the prophecy was fulfilled. Led by Titus, the Roman army attacked Jerusalem, burned the temple to the ground, killed over a million Jews, and drove them out of the holy land. From 66 A.D. to 135 A.D., in fulfillment of the word “desolations are determined,” Rome waged war against Jerusalem, Judah, and the Jewish people, until eventually, the Jewish people were driven out of the land for over 1,800 years.

Does Daniel 9:27 Refer to Christ?

Gabriel continued, stretching far beyond Daniel’s time into our day, stating, “And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate” (Dan. 9:27).

What does this portion of the prophecy mean? Some have argued it describes Jesus Christ, who made “a firm covenant”—specifically the New Covenant—with many for one week. As the argument goes, in the middle of the week, Christ put “a stop to sacrifice and grain offering,” forever ending the Jewish sacrificial system, which could only temporarily atone for sins.

But there are several problems with this interpretation. First, if this describes Christ cutting the New Covenant, then this covenant could only last for one week—or for seven years. Therefore, the New Covenant would not be valid seven years after Jesus’ crucifixion. Those who interpret this prophecy as Christ cutting the New Covenant have a real issue. To make this interpretation valid, they are forced to make the last week—or last seven years—a symbolic representation of eternal completion. They must switch from a literal meaning of 483 years to a symbolic meaning of 7 years. As interpreters of biblical prophecy, we don’t have the luxury of making these 70 seven-year periods mean different things. If these seven-year periods meant 483 literal years between the decree to rebuild Jerusalem and the crucifixion of Christ, then the last week must also mean 7 literal years.

The second problem is the temple sacrificial system didn’t end 3.5 years after Jesus was crucified. It ended about forty years after the cross, when Rome ransacked Jerusalem and burned the temple to the ground in 70 A.D.

The third problem is the temple sacrifices stop because of an abomination. The one who sets up the abomination also makes “desolate, even until a complete destruction . . . is poured out on the one who makes desolate.” This can’t possibly refer to Christ. Jesus’ New Covenant sacrifice was clearly not an abomination. Nor was He completely destroyed after the desolation.

For these three clear reasons, Daniel 9:27 cannot refer to Christ and the New Covenant sacrifice He inaugurated on the cross. What does it mean then?

The Future Fulfillment of Daniel 9:27

Gabriel’s statement in Daniel 9:27, when he said, “On the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate,” is synonymous with the “the abomination of desolation,” which Jesus said was the catalyst for the Great Tribulation (Dan. 11:31; 12:11; Matt. 24:15). As many end-time-prophecy teachers argue, the antichrist is the one who makes a firm covenant with many people, including the Jews and the Arabs. This seven-year-peace treaty will allow Israel to resume their Levitical sacrificial system prescribed by the Torah. When this happens, the nations will proclaim with joy, “Peace and safety has come to the nations. We have finally resolved a centuries-old conflict. A new day has dawned for the world” (1 Thess. 5:3). Unfortunately, many Christians will celebrate this peaceful alliance between the world’s religions.

When Israel signs this peace treaty, Isaiah said they will make a covenant with death (Isa. 28:18). Sadly, the Jewish people will pay severely for it. In that day, the word of the Lord to Israel will be: “Your covenant with death will be canceled, and your pact with Sheol will not stand; when the overwhelming scourge passes through, then you become its trampling place” (Isa. 28:18).

Suddenly, like a thief in the night, “destruction will come upon” Israel and the nations “like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape” (1 Thess. 5:3). Without warning, the antichrist will break the peace covenant 3.5 years in, putting an end to the Jewish sacrificial system. He will then enthrone himself in the temple, proclaim himself as god, and force the nations to worship him (Rev. 13:4-8; 2 Thess. 2:4). This abomination will lead to a world-wide desolation as he goes forth “conquering and to conquer” (Rev. 6:2). But as Gabriel assured us, the antichrist will be completely destroyed. When Jesus returns, He will cast the antichrist alive into the lake of fire, where he will be tormented for eternity (Rev. 19:20).

What amazes me about the Lord, and specifically this prophecy, is how precisely God fulfilled it in history. Since this is true, we can have complete confidence God will also fulfill the remaining part in the future. You simply can’t make this up.

Consider this for a minute. When we come to the book of Revelation, written six centuries after the book of Daniel, we see the last half of Daniel’s Seventieth Week. That is, we see a literal period of 3.5 years mentioned four times. For example, John used the phrase “forty-two months,” “one thousand two hundred and sixty days,” and “a time [one year] and times [two years] and half a time [half a year]” to describe the last half of Daniel’s Seventieth Week (Rev. 11:3; 12:6; 12:14; 13:5; emphasis mine). For 3.5 years, God—not the devil—will sovereignly give the antichrist authority to act. This involves him waging war in the nations, invading Israel, instituting the mark of the beast, and killing Jews and Christians.

Jesus referred to this last 3.5-year period of Daniel’s Seventieth Week as the Great Tribulation, which will be inaugurated when the antichrist sets up the “abomination of desolation” in the Jewish temple (Matt. 24:15, 21). Most conservative scholars agree that the last week of Daniel’s Seventy Week Prophecy is the backbone of all end-time prophecy.

End-Time Prophecy is Jerusalem-Centric

Here’s an important point to grasp. These 490 years are related specifically to the Jewish people living in the land of Israel, occupying the city of Jerusalem, and performing the temple sacrifices.

The prophecy began with a decree to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Later, the Messiah came and was crucified while the Jews occupied Jerusalem and were performing the temple sacrifices. And now, with Israel becoming a nation again in 1948, after 1,800-plus years of desolation, and having captured the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967, the last week of Daniel’s prophecy is close to being fulfilled. When the Jewish people are allowed to resume their temple sacrifices, the Lord will release the pause button on this prophecy, and the final seven-year countdown to Jesus’ return will be on.

This explains why there has been an over 1,800-year pause in this prophecy. Some scholars argue this long gap proves Daniel’s Seventy-Week Prophecy has already been fulfilled. But that’s not true. The reason for the long gap is simple. This prophecy is only enforced when the Jewish people live in the land of Israel, occupy the city of Jerusalem, and have authority to perform their temple sacrifices.

To wrap this up, it’s important to see end-time prophecy is Jerusalem-centric. Israel and the Jewish people are at centerstage of end-time prophecy. In this session, we looked in detail at God’s six-fold purpose for the nation of Israel and the Jewish people, which is accomplished over a divine timetable of 490 years. The Lord has and will accomplish this purpose by using four worldwide empires as instruments to refine, purge, prepare, and judge Israel and the Jewish people.

In the next session, we will look in detail at these four worldwide empires, which are revealed in Daniel 2 and 7.

¹ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H7620&t=NASB>

² Whether this temple is a physical building or refers to His people as a temple is debated among scholars.

³ This fact is determined by comparing Genesis 7:11 and Genesis 8:4. In Genesis 7:11, we see that the flood started on the second month and the seventeenth day. Then, in Genesis 8:4, we see that the flood ended on the seventh month and the seventeenth day. Thus, the flood lasted for 5 months. We are also told that the flood lasted for 150 days (Gen. 7:24). 150 days/5 months = 30 days per month. This shows that the biblical calendar contains 30 days per month. This is confirmed when comparing Revelation 12:6 and 13:5.

⁴ Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Zondervan), location 1745 in the Kindle app

⁵ <https://www.neverthirsty.org/bible-studies/book-of-daniel/prophecy-of-daniels-70-weeks/>

⁶ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H3772&t=NASB>

⁷ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H3772&t=NASB>

⁸ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H369&t=NASB>