

God Answers Prayer...His Own Way

Daniel 9:1-27

Studies in Daniel #10

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AT the beginning of the 400s, the great Bible translator and commentator Jerome wrote a commentary on Daniel. When he came to the end of chapter 9, he listed nine interpretations and said it's up to the reader to decide which one to follow. If there were nine interpretations back then, there are nine hundred today! This passage reminds me of a time I attended the opening service of a new church plant and the pastor said, "We need to get back to basics," then he proceeded into a series through Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation and what they say about the "end times."

I know the "seventy weeks" of Daniel has been made popular by Dispensational theologians and popularized in books and movies, but I want you to note from the outset that it doesn't stand alone by itself for prophecy experts to fit into their scheme; no, it's an answer to Daniel's prayer.

God's Promise of Desolation (vv. 1-2)

Verse 1 takes us back to the end of chapter 5 when the Medo-Persian Empire conquered the Babylonians and power transitioned from Belshazzar to Darius (5:30-31). Daniel dates this narrative **in the first year of Darius** (v.

1). As Daniel was studying the scroll of the prophet Jeremiah he was reminded of *God's promise of desolation: I...perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years* (v. 2).

Turn to Jeremiah 25. In verses 8–9 “the LORD of hosts” says “because you have not obeyed my words...I will send for...Nebuchadnezzar.” We saw that in Daniel 1. In verses 11–12 the Lord says Judah “shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon...for their iniquity.”

Turn also to Jeremiah 29. After telling the exiles to hunker down for the long haul by building homes, he says this in verse 10: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.” Then comes one of the most oft-quoted out-of-context verses that’s probably framed in all our homes: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (v. 11). Note it’s not a generic promise for us, but was a specific promise for the exiles of Israel who would pray and the Lord would answer and “restore your fortunes and gather you

from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you...and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile” (vv. 12–14).

The application of Daniel’s Bible study is not, “Read your Bible,” but in times of trouble we as God’s people are to look to the promises of God’s Word for our comfort and support. And as Jesus tells us in the world we will have much tribulation and that there will be wars and rumors of wars—to paraphrase that ubiquitous tee-shirt—we need to stay calm and promise on.

Daniel’s Prayer for Restoration (vv. 3–19)

Those promises of God’s Word caused Daniel to respond in words with a *prayer for restoration*. He did what chapter 3 said he did three times a day and **turned [his] face to the Lord God**, facing Jerusalem, **seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes** (v. 3). That’s strange, isn’t it? I mean he knows God is going to visit his people and restore them to the land. Why isn’t he packing his bags, getting his sunscreen on, and standing out front waiting for the caravan to pick him up? Instead he prays! There’s a lesson in here for us somewhere!

What does he pray? The heart of his prayer is confession of sins: **I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession** (v. 4). But even when he confessed sins he began with adoration! **“O Lord, the great and**

awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments” (v. 4). Daniel is praying out loud Exodus 20:6 and Deuteronomy 7:9, 21. Daniel not only read and studied the Word; he prayed the Word! Hint, hint! This so important to our spiritual vitality. When we plead the promises, we know it’s God’s will; we know God hears; we know God will answer. The old Puritan adage is that in prayer we are to show God his own handwriting. Look at this prayer with me.

Daniel confesses the guilt of sin: “we have sinned...done wrong...acted wickedly...rebelled...turn[ed] aside from your commandments and rules...and not listened to your servants the prophets” (vv. 5, 6). If I said this was an “A to Z” description of sin, what would I be saying? It’s describing every possible nook and cranny of sin: thoughts, words, deeds, omission, commission, and everything in between.

*Daniel confesses the consequences of sin. Specifically shame. Look at the contrast Daniel makes: **to you, O Lord, belongs righteousness,**” meaning, uprightness according to the standard of his own law; **“but to us open shame”** (v. 7). And this shame extended to all whether **“near or far...in all the lands to which you have driven them”** (v. 7).*

Daniel confesses the only hope for sinners is God's abundant mercy: "To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, literally "mercies" and "forgivenesses" recounting his continual and innumerable past acts (v. 9).

Daniel confesses the faithful anger of God in his punishment. Because "all Israel has transgressed your law...the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses...have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him" (v. 11). God made promises, not only of grace but promises of his impending judgments if Israel sinned all the way back in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Israel did sin, so God kept his Word: "He has confirmed his words" (v. 12). It wasn't the kind of keeping his word they wanted, but it showed his faithfulness.

*Daniel confesses Israel's double guilt. Despite knowing all this, they didn't act! "...yet we have **not entreated the favor of the LORD our God, turning from our iniquities**" (v. 13). What's so insightful is that Daniel is not so much concerned with Israel's returning to the land but that the people themselves return to the Lord! We've got it all backward, don't we? We pray with such concern to "get our stuff;" but God shows us in Daniel's instructive prayer that he wants us to give him our stuff—our sins! What is it that one person once said: what do we contribute to our salvation? Our sins!*

Give them to God, friends! Confess them today! Don't wait! One of the hallmarks of true Christianity is confession of sin. "If we say we have no sin..."

Daniel makes supplication for Israel's restoration. The basis for restoration to the land is God's own reputation. When he "**brought his people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand he made a name for himself**" (v. 15). This name is now on the line: "**because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become a byword**" (v. 16). So he prays, "**for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary...we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy**" (vv. 17, 18). He concludes: "**O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act**" (v. 20).

God's Answer of Consummation (vv. 20–27)

Daniel's reading, Daniel's praying; what's God doing? Sending an *answer of consummation*. There's a saying, "If you don't want the answer, don't ask." He asks God to hear, forgive, and act; he does, in his own way!

If you're ever listening to some Christian radio preacher who says, "Daniel 9 is perfectly clear," you clearly ought to change the station! There are dozens of textual difficulties here. But if you didn't change the station

and he goes on to say, “We’re not into allegorical interpretation but the literal meaning,” then you know he’s not being honest! Everyone takes the seventy weeks figurative somehow. How? The text says **seventy sevens** (v. 24), which we take to mean **weeks**. Second, if we literally interpreted **seventy weeks** this would be 490 days or a mere year and 125 days. I mentioned God’s covenant curses from Leviticus 26. In those curses God says he would punish Israel *sevenfold* for their sins (vv. 18, 21, 24, 28). In other words, the punishment of seventy years of exile is going to be experienced sevenfold! So seventy weeks is a figure.

Now, some try to make an actual 490 years fit into a timeline. Kids, I’m old enough to remember this weird little tool called a “shoehorn.” If you had shoes that were too small or tight, you would get out this smooth horn shaped thing put it at the back of the shoe and try to slide your foot in. Some people try to shoehorn 490 years into a timeline. Their problem is we do not know exactly whose **word to restore and build Jerusalem** Daniel is referring to. Is it Cyrus’ decree in 538BC (2 Chron. 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–4)? Is it Artaxerxes I’s decree in 458BC (Ezra 7)? Is it Artaxerxes’ later 445BC decree (Neh. 2:1–8)? If this is supposed to be an actual 490 years why does God reveal it as seven, then sixty-two, then one seven or week? This is a strange

way of saying seventy. Again, this is a figure. Seven means a short and restricted time period; sixty-two means a lengthy but restricted time; and one is a short and final climax. Why do I say all this? So that we focus on what is truly clear and leave the rest for Jesus' coming. What is clear is that God is answering Daniel's prayer by telling him the kingdom of God will come, but not immediately; so they have to patiently endure until the end.

In verse 24 the **seventy weeks** are summarized. In this time God will accomplish six things: **to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity**, heaping up three terms for sin to say God will finally and fully deal with every kind of sin; **to bring in everlasting righteousness**, that eternal state wherein righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3); **to seal both vision and prophet**, meaning, God will authenticate their words by their fulfillment; **and to anoint a most holy place**, which is a difficulty of whether this is a person or a place? Most likely it's a place. Then these "**weeks**" are broken down.

First comes **seven weeks** between **the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem and the coming of an anointed one, a prince** (v. 25). Who is the **anointed one**? Some say King Cyrus, whom God calls his "Messiah" in Isaiah 45 while others say it's Ezra the anointed priest

who confessed sins and renewed the covenant. The point of this is to say that the time is coming shortly for restoration in the land.

Next comes **sixty-two weeks** during which Jerusalem **shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time** (v. 25). This is God's assurance that life will be back to normal in the land, albeit with troublesome persecution. There's a scene in *The Pilgrim's Progress* in which Christian is taken into Interpreter's house and he sees a fireplace. There's a man throwing water but it's not going out instead it's getting hotter. Interpreter takes Christian behind the wall where he sees Jesus throwing oil on the same fire! When Israel gets back to the land it will be a troublesome time, but God is faithful to preserve them despite it all!

Finally comes the seventieth week. Verse 26 states it: **an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing**. Everyone of all eschatological persuasions take this as the death of Jesus the Messiah of Israel. Then we read: **And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed**. The simplest reading is that this is what the Roman Empire did in 70AD. This is that fourth beast of Daniel 2 and 7. Then verse 27 reiterates verse 26: **And he shall make a**

strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. Who is “**he**?” The previous “he” is the prince who is to come, meaning, the Roman general Titus, but the word used here for **covenant** is *higbir*, which means to confirm an existing covenant; this is why it’s clearest to say this is Jesus at last Supper where he said, “This is the new covenant in my blood.” **And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.** This takes us back to General Titus and the Roman legions in 70AD.

“We need to get back to basics,” that preacher once said as he proceeded into a series on obscure eschatological texts. Daniel 9, though, is focused on God’s answer to Daniel’s prayer that he will restore in his faithfulness and that his people must faithfully endure whatever he sends upon them in this life that our Catechism calls “a valley of tears” (Q&A 26).
Let’s pray...