



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 13 Issue 35

September 7, 2014

Truths for Bitter Providences, Part 8

It is easy in Bible study to get so wrapped up in a passage of scripture that we miss the big picture and the reason for the passage in the first place. In my estimation, many do that when it comes to Daniel 9. Either they are in such a hurry to get to Daniel 9:24-27 that they pass over Daniel's prayer. Or they are so enthralled by Daniel's prayer (Daniel 9:1-19) that they miss the overall purpose of this chapter in the book of Daniel. We need to be very careful NOT to divorce Daniel 9 from the overall purpose of the book of Daniel which was to encourage a struggling people!

Daniel was the first prophet to write as an exile, in exile, for a people in exile. As such, he penned this prophecy to answer two questions: When the pain and difficulties of this life come crashing in what is the servant of Christ to do? What is there to encourage them?

As to the first question, chapter 1 would say: Purpose within yourself to seek the Lord, honor the Lord, worship the Lord, trust the Lord! As we have seen, that is a major theme of this book.

As to the second question, chapters 2-12 are Daniel’s answer of which we’ve seen seven thus far.

- Be Encouraged! Your God is Great and so Rules Kings and Nations, Daniel 2.
- Be Encouraged! Your God is Holy and therefore has a Plan that is Beyond your Ability to Understand, Daniel 3.
- Be Encouraged! Your God Reigns and so Holds the Heart of the King in His Hands, Daniel 4.
- Be Encouraged! Your God is Jealous and so will not allow Himself- and so the Believer- to be Mocked, Daniel 5.
- Be Encouraged! Your God’s Way is Infallible and so makes no Mistakes when it comes to the Child of God, Daniel 6.
- Be Encouraged! In the end, God’s People Win, Daniel 7.
- Be Sobered! Until the End, God’s Kingdom will Suffer Violence, Daniel 8!

Now we have the eighth word of encouragement: God is faithful to His promises and so His people, Daniel 9! And yet, Daniel does make his point by recording a prayer whose obvious purpose was both to encourage God’s people with a glorious truth as well as to give them an example of how to pray in the crucible!

We are going to diverge just briefly from the over-all theme of Daniel and discuss prayer in the crucible. However, before we close our examination of this passage we will give due regard to the overall theme of Daniel and how this prayer fits with it. With that, notice that God is faithful to His promises and His people.

Faithful to His Promises and His People

Daniel 9:1, “In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent¹, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans.”

With the time indicators in this verse, we obviously are back to the first year of the regency of Cyrus II. The year would be 539 BC (Daniel would have been in his early 80’s). Recall, “Darius” was a title, like “Pharaoh” or “Caesar,” and in fact could be translated as, “holder of the scepter.”

Chronological Outline		
Chapter	Date	King
1	605	Nebuchadnezzar
2	604	Nebuchadnezzar
3	604/3	Nebuchadnezzar
4	565	Nebuchadnezzar
7	552/1	Belshazzar
8	550/49	Belshazzar
5	539	Belshazzar
6	539	Darius/Cyrus
9	539	Darius/Cyrus
11	538	Darius/Cyrus
12	538	Darius/Cyrus
10	537	Darius/Cyrus

From the Chronological Outline of Daniel you will see that Daniel's prayer occurred around the time of Daniel 6 and The Lion's Den. In other words if you want to know what was on Daniel's heart and mind around the time Cyrus issued the decree which led Daniel to the lion's den, read chapter 9!

Daniel 9:2, "In the first year of his reign I, Daniel, observed in the books [the definite article is in the Hebrew here... in other words, Daniel is not talking about any old book, but THE book- the Bible] the number of the years which was *revealed as* the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, *namely*, seventy years."

This is incredible! At this time in his life, Daniel is well into his 80's and has walked with God his entire life. He is also a prophet to whom God manifested dreams and visions of future events which frequently revealed God's word and will to this prophet. And yet do you know what Daniel did on an obviously frequent basis? He spent time in the word of God! His prophetic office, godliness, and wisdom did NOT exempt him from the responsibility that he had to be a student of God's word!

Now we know that Jewish scrolls containing God's word were taken along with the people of God as they were brought into the exile. As such, Daniel obviously had a copy of a set of these scrolls of which included the book of Jeremiah! There are two passages which Daniel references here: Jeremiah 25:11-12 or 29:10 which is why he says, "I observed in the bookS..." Speaking of the exile, Jeremiah wrote this:

Jeremiah 25:11-12, "'And this whole land shall be a desolation and a horror, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' declares the Lord, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation.'"

Jeremiah 29:10, "For thus says the Lord, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.'"

Daniel in his early 80's is reading through the word of God; specifically Jeremiah. It has been close to seventy years since Daniel came into exile, and lo and behold he reads this:

Jeremiah 29:10, "...when seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place."

It is obvious that to Daniel, the Bible was the authoritative word of God, without question! Accordingly, what it says will most certainly come to pass! We'll come back to this toward the end of our study.

Now the question which Daniel no doubt struggled with (and you see it here in the fact that Daniel isn't absolutely confident that a return was going to happen soon) was this: When did

the seventy year exile begin?

Recall that he went into exile in 605 BC, but then there were two more exiles: one in 597 BC and one in 586 BC. Daniel knew with confidence that the exile would last seventy years; he just didn't know when that seventy years began and so when it would end!² Regardless, it was this tremendous truth that brought Daniel to his knees in prayer!

We might wonder why Daniel would pray since he already knew that God was going to bring His people back; so it isn't like his prayer was going to change anything! But herein is an important principle for us. Prayer is NOT a tool God has given to change things. RATHER it is a vehicle which enables the child of God to fellowship with the Lord and so participate in the outworking of God's Kingdom. John Hannah said this:

The end of prayer is not so much tangible answers as a deepening life of dependency. ... The call to prayer is a call to love, submission, and obedience... the avenue of sweet, intimate, and intense fellowship of the soul with the infinite Creator. (MacArthur, 1985, p. 386)

This we must see was that which drove Daniel in his prayer life. It wasn't to change the mind of God (he already knew God was going to restore His people to the land). Rather, it was a vehicle of complicity and so devotion! And thus we read this:

Daniel 9:3-4a, "So I gave my attention to the Lord God [literally I set my face] to seek *Him* by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes [you must see, prayer wasn't something Daniel did in passing or on the go; his life reflected a conviction that prayer was important and so he worked at praying]. And I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed and said, 'Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God...'"

Three things stick out here: Daniel's humility, confession, and reverence! Daniel and the people of God have suffered greatly over the last sixty-six years. From a human perspective, it would be quite easy to be angry with God. Yet the man of God responds to trial and suffering in just the opposite way:

- Instead of anger, there is humility! The Hebrew word translated here for "seek" (בָּקַשׁ [bāqāš]) means "desire, ask, or request." There is another Hebrew word for "seek" in the Bible (דָּרַשׁ [dāraš]); it means "inquire" or "investigate." Accordingly, the pattern that we see in the Old Testament for praying was (1) to seek to understand what God was doing (דָּרַשׁ [dāraš]) and then seek (בָּקַשׁ [bāqāš]) that God do it. From this we see that prayer is not twisting God's arm to get what we want. It is working with God to see His will implemented on the earth. That is the idea behind, "Thy will be done!" That was the heart and soul of Daniel here!
- Instead of accusation and blame-shifting, there is confession! We are going to examine this in more detail next time. But for now notice how burdened Daniel is on account of

both his and the people's sin! It reminds us of Isaiah, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5)!

- Instead of putting God in His place, there is reverence and awe- this we will see today! Unlike Habakkuk, Jonah, the disciples, and the like, Daniel did NOT take God to task for any perceived wrong-doing or unfulfilled expectation! Daniel went into the valley of the shadow of death with his eyes fixed on Christ!

Prayer in the Crucible, God's Greatness

Daniel 9:4, "I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed and said, "Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God"

From this I conclude that the reason we don't pray much today is because our view of God is not very high! In contrast, notice that the word for "great" (גָּדוֹל [gādôl]) carries the idea of being great in either size or importance! IOW, to Daniel, there was nothing in heaven or on earth as large or as important as God! He also used the word, "awesome" (יָרֵא [yārē']- in the Niphal/passive means "to be feared") which here denotes the idea of abject reverence/awe. This is why Daniel prayed as frequently and as intensely as he did. He knew that when He prayed he was kneeling before the great I Am! Solomon exhorted:

Ecclesiastes 5:2, "Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few."

Yet we've lost this/or never had it. Today our view of God is quite low and so we don't pray!

Psalms 50:21, "These things you have done, and I kept silence; [which made you think] that I was just like you..."

This is the classic problem we have as sinners. We assume all people are like ourselves and so impute motive and objective onto others! If you are driven by money, then everyone must be driven by money. If you struggle with a certain temptation, then everyone must struggle with the same temptation. It is bad enough that we do this with other people. But it is poison to our soul when we do this with God. Listen, if you remained silent when your children were struggling, it most likely would be that you are angry with them; maybe you are pouting or seeking to punish them emotionally. The sinful heart will therefore conclude that that must be why God is silent to our prayer! With this mindset, it is little wonder why we don't pray.

High views of God produce prayer warriors! This was Daniel! We know he prayed not just one time a day, but three (Daniel 6:10)! This is such a contrast to the average American pastor who prays less than two minutes a day! So Daniel prayed because of God's greatness. Notice further that which served as the ground for Daniel's praying was God's faithfulness.

God's Faithfulness

Daniel 9:4, "and I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed and said, "Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and loving kindness for those who love Him and keep His commandment"

What is it that stood out to Daniel here when it came to God? His faithfulness. God is able to be trusted. "He keeps His covenant and loving-kindness for those who love Him and keep His commandment."

Now at first glance it looks like Daniel is saying that God's faithfulness is predicated upon our faithfulness. In the English that is how this passage seems to read. Yet we know that is false. Paul states it this way:

2 Timothy 2:13, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself."

God's faithfulness is NOT predicated upon our own. Then what is Daniel communicating here when he says that God "keeps covenant... for those who love Him and keep His commandment"? You must see that the statement, "for those who love Him and keep His commandments" is NOT the condition for God's love and faithfulness, BUT the object of it! In other words, for someone to "love God and keep His commandments" testifies to the saving work of God in their lives.

1 John 4:19: "We love, because He first loved us!"

It is to these people that God is faithful and so keeps His covenant! It is to these people that God continues to express unconditional love at all times in all places! Daniel knew this *a priori*- that is independent of experience! In other words, Daniel's conviction about God wasn't because of anything God had done. Daniel presumed this truth about God... which is why he prayed!

If you think God is like you, then you will derive your understanding about God from what He does. And because at times He deigns to be silent (cf. Psalms 50:21a), you will conclude that God is NOT loving or faithful. Who would want to pray to such a One? But if you believe *a priori* that God is faithful and loving, then with Daniel you will have an accurate view of God and so you will pray! Daniel's prayer arose because he knew God to be awesome and yet faithful to His promises/word! Notice another basis for Daniel's prayer is God's condescending grace.

Condescending Grace

In confessing his sin, Daniel made this incredible statement.

Daniel 9:6, "Moreover, we have not listened to Thy servants the prophets, who spoke in Thy name to our kings, our princes, our fathers, and all the people of the land."

In his confession Daniel further said this:

Daniel 9:10, “Nor have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in His teachings which He set before us through His servants the prophets.”

It is easy to skip over the implication of these statements on the part of Daniel, but to do so is to miss an important truth. If God’s people failed to heed “the voice of God given through the prophets,” what does this imply when it comes to God’s frequent and ongoing response to His people’s sin and rebellion? God was NOT sitting back with arms folded and a scowl on His face. RATHER, He was seeking after His people! Recall the activity of the father of the Prodigal Son.

Luke 15:20b, “...But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him.”

The only way the prodigal’s father could have seen him while he still a long way off, is if the boy’s dad was seeking him in the distant land! That clearly is what is implied here. What is God doing with the book of Daniel? He is meeting His people in their suffering with words of consolation and encouragement that they might overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved them! This God did throughout the sordid history of His people when they were a nation.

Jeremiah 7:25-26, “Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets, daily rising early and sending *them*. Yet they did not listen to Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck; they did evil more than their fathers.”

Acts 7:52, [in the loaded words of Stephen] “Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?”

That God’s people did NOT listen to the word of God when it was given BUT instead killed and persecuted the prophets reflects an important action on the part of God: He was always seeking His people out in His grace! It was the knowledge of this that led Daniel to pray as he did here! His/our God is not a far-off deity who dwells on Mount Olympus and views His would-be servants as ants! He is a gracious and loving God who is near you (Romans 10:6-8)! Do you believe that? Notice a fourth characteristic about God which brought Daniel to his knees, God’s righteousness.

Righteousness

Daniel 9:7, “Righteousness belongs to Thee, O Lord, but to us open shame, as it is this day...”

The idea behind this statement is that God makes no mistakes. He is perfect in His dealings both with this world and with man. For example, look at the nation prior and up to Daniel.

Daniel 9:11-12, "Indeed all Israel has transgressed Thy law and turned aside, not obeying Thy voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him. Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity; for under the whole heaven there has not been done *anything* like what was done to Jerusalem."

When God organized His people into a nation- when Israel became a national entity- God gave them many warnings- of which was:

Leviticus 26:14-17, "But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, *and* so break My covenant, I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that shall waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you shall sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies shall eat it up. And I will set My face against you so that you shall be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when no one is pursuing you."

From the very beginning, when Israel became a nation, God said that their existence would be conditioned by their national obedience to God's word. If they rebelled, they would be sent into exile! What did God's people do as a nation? They rebelled- to which Daniel said this:

Daniel 9:14, "Therefore, the Lord has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us; for the Lord our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice."

The reason why God's people suffered as they did at this time in Redemptive History was NOT because God unjustly punished them. RATHER, it was because God's people rebelled against the Lord and so did not do that which was required for them to be a Christian nation!

- You say, "*So God in His anger cast them into exile?!*"
- No! God in His justice withheld His preserving grace. What happened to the nation after that occurred because they no longer enjoyed the protecting grace of God!

Daniel knew this! And by this time, so did all God's people! Recall the books of Chronicles were written in the exile to express an important truth to God's people: "*The exile stands as testimony NOT that God forsake His people, BUT that His people forsook their God!*"

Christian, do you understand that this fallen world, this world of sin and misery, exists NOT because God let us down, BUT because we in Adam forsook God? Do you understand that Redemptive History is the record of God working to undo the fall? And do you understand that God's work will not be completed until the destruction of this world and its renewal on the last

day when Christ returns?

If so, then let us stop judging God by feeble sense!

Imagine that you cut hair for a living and prior to the Oscars, you were hired to cut the hair of some famous actor or actress. This is your big break! If people notice their hair, they will come to you for business! So of course, you are thrilled to have been hired. But then imagine that the movie star stops you in the middle of the haircut and says, "We're finished! I'm going to attend like this!" Would that be fair... when the cultural critics come out *en masse* and express their shock at whoever did their hair? Would it be fair that from that day on your name would be mud and no one would come to you because of your work on the celebrity? What would you say? "Hey, give me a break! He stopped me in the middle of the job! That isn't at all what I planned!"

And so we must say to any and all who would judge the half-finished work of God in redemption, "Hey, give Him a break! You are judging God in the middle of His plan. What you see isn't at all what He is going to do!"

Daniel knew that any and all appearance of impropriety or inequity in this world is NOT because of God, BUT because of man! God is a righteous Being who is in the middle of His redemptive work! With this conviction, Daniel prayed!

Bibliography

MacArthur, J. (1985). *Matthew 1-7 (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary)*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.

End Notes

¹ "It is ... now recognized that Xerxes (Ahasuerus) may be an ancient Achaemenid royal "title" '. W. F. Albright has argued that the name Darius may be an old Iranian title, and while this remains a theory it is in keeping with known history for a monarch to have more than one name, as, e.g., in the case of Tiglath-Pileser who is also called Pul (2 Kgs 15:19, 29; 1 Chr. 5:26). (Baldwin, J. G., *Daniel*, TOTC, p. 182)

² And neither really do we... It could have started in 605 BC (the date of Jeremiah 25:11) and so ended around 539 BC (the date of the restoration under Cyrus). Or it could have started in 586 BC (the date of the destruction of Jerusalem) and so ended around 516 BC (when the Temple restoration was completed). A relevant passage which might help us answer the question is Zechariah 1:12 (written in 519 BC). Here the prophet reports the words of an angel who asks, "How long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?" Based on this, we conclude that at the time of the writing of Zechariah the seventy years were apparently still in process in 519 B.C. If that is the case, then we would date the *terminus a quo* to 586 BC.