

The Book of Daniel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 9: Daniel's Prayer and the Seventy Weeks

Daniel 9:1-27

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson carries the heaviest doctrinal weight in the entire study, and you should state the issue to your students plainly. The prophecy of the seventy weeks is one of the most important Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, and one of the most abused. Its God-given center is not in doubt, because Gabriel states it: the seventy weeks are decreed to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness (9:24), and this is accomplished when the Anointed One, the Messiah, is cut off (9:26). This is a prophecy that reaches its goal in the atoning death of Jesus Christ. Your central task is to help students see that the seventy weeks culminate in Christ and the cross.

Equally important is helping students understand and reject the dispensational "gap theory." This popular system detaches the seventieth week from the first sixty-nine, inserts a gap of now nearly two thousand years (the entire church age), and projects the final week onto a future seven-year tribulation featuring a rebuilt Jerusalem temple, restored animal sacrifices, and a personal Antichrist who makes and breaks a covenant. Teach students that there is no biblical warrant for such a gap. The prophecy is a unified whole that reaches its climax in Christ's first coming: His death atones for sin (Daniel 9:24, 26), and the resulting end of the temple order, dramatized when the curtain was torn at His death and accomplished historically in the destruction of Jerusalem, brings the sacrificial system to its God-appointed end (Matthew 27:50-51; Hebrews 9 and 10).

Hold together the two halves of this chapter, for they belong together. The first half is one of Scripture's great models of prayer: Daniel, moved by God's word, confesses his people's sin without excuse, pleads God's mercy rather than human merit, and prays for God's glory, and is told he is greatly loved and heard. The second half is the answer, a prophecy that points to the cross where sin is finally atoned. The lesson is profoundly formational: it calls students to humble confession, to rest in God's mercy rather than their own righteousness, to pray for God's glory, to approach God as loved and heard, and above all to rest in the finished work of Christ, in whom the deepest purpose of all redemptive history has been accomplished.

Question 1

Student Question:

Daniel was moved to prayer by reading God's promise in the book of Jeremiah that the exile would last seventy years (9:2-3). What does this teach about how God's word should shape our

prayers and our hope? How does knowing God's promises give confidence and direction to our praying (compare 1 John 5:14)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the catalyst of Daniel's prayer: the open Scripture. "I, Daniel, 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" (9:2). Daniel was reading Jeremiah, and what he read drove him to prayer. God's word shaped his praying.

Help students see the right relationship between God's word and prayer. Daniel did not invent his hopes; he found them in Scripture, and then he prayed those promises back to God. This is the healthiest pattern of prayer: it is anchored in what God has revealed, so that we pray with confidence according to His will (compare 1 John 5:14). Scripture fuels and directs prayer.

Note that the promise did not make Daniel passive. One might think that if God had already decreed seventy years, there was nothing to pray about; the outcome was fixed. But Daniel understood that God's promises are not excuses for passivity; they are invitations to prayer. God ordains the end and the means, and prayer is one of the means by which His promises come to pass.

Apply this to the believer. A deeper knowledge of God's promises should produce not complacency but fervency. The more we grasp what God has pledged to do, the more confidently and earnestly we can pray for it. The praying life and the studying life belong together; the word feeds prayer, and prayer responds to the word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's word as the foundation and fuel of prayer (Daniel 9:2-3).
- Praying God's promises back to Him with confidence (1 John 5:14).
- God's promises as invitations to prayer, not excuses for passivity.
- God ordaining both the end and the means, including prayer.
- The studying life and the praying life belonging together.

Discussion Prompts

- How did God's word shape and fuel Daniel's prayer?
- Why do God's promises lead the faithful to pray more, not less?
- How could Scripture more deeply shape your own praying?

Question 2

Student Question:

Daniel responded to God's promise not by sitting back to wait, but by seeking God earnestly in prayer, fasting, and confession. When you learn what God has promised or commanded, do you

tend toward passive waiting or active, prayerful seeking? Where is God calling you to pray and seek Him more earnestly right now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses the relationship between knowing and seeking. Daniel responded to God's word not by sitting back to wait for prophecy to fulfill itself, but by seeking God with prayer, fasting, and confession (9:3). Knowledge of God's promise became the spark for earnest seeking.

Help students examine their own tendency. When we learn what God has promised or commanded, do we move toward active, prayerful engagement, or toward passive waiting? It is easy to treat God's sovereignty as a reason to do nothing, when Scripture treats it as a reason to pray and seek all the more.

Name the danger of a passivity that hides behind theology. "If God has decided, my prayers do not matter," is a subtle excuse for prayerlessness. Daniel believed firmly in God's sovereign decree, and it made him pray harder, not less. The truly humble response to God's promises is earnest seeking, not folded hands.

Move toward concrete seeking. Encourage students to identify an area where they know God's promise or will but have been passively waiting, and to begin actively seeking Him in prayer about it. The aim is the engaged, fervent prayer that flows from confidence in God's word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Active, prayerful seeking as the right response to God's promises.
- The danger of using God's sovereignty as an excuse for passivity.
- Fervent prayer flowing from confidence in God's word (James 5:16).
- Engagement rather than folded hands as the mark of humble faith.

Discussion Prompts

- Do you tend toward passive waiting or active, prayerful seeking?
- Where might you be hiding passivity behind a belief in God's control?
- Where is God calling you to seek Him more earnestly right now?

Question 3

Student Question:

Daniel's prayer is saturated with the confession of sin: "we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled" (9:5). What does his confession reveal about the seriousness of sin and the honesty God desires from us? Why is genuine confession, owning our sin without excuse, essential to a right relationship with a holy God (1 John 1:8-9)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Turn to the heart of Daniel's prayer: confession. "We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules" (9:5). The piling up of words, sinned, done wrong, acted wickedly, rebelled, shows the thoroughness of his confession. He does not minimize, excuse, or explain away. He names the sin plainly.

Help students see what genuine confession involves. It is the honest naming of sin as sin, without the self-justifications we habitually attach. Daniel does not say "mistakes were made" or "we meant well"; he says "we have rebelled." This kind of unvarnished honesty before God is the doorway to forgiveness and the mark of a heart that takes both sin and God's holiness seriously.

Connect this to the New Testament promise. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves... If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9). Confession is not informing God of something He does not know; it is agreeing with God about our sin, the necessary honesty on which forgiveness and fellowship rest.

Apply this against the culture of excuse. We live in an age skilled at explaining sin away, as illness, as someone else's fault, as a social construct. Daniel's prayer cuts through all of it. The way back to a holy God is not through excuse but through honest confession that owns the sin and casts itself on mercy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Genuine confession as honest naming of sin without excuse (Daniel 9:5).
- Confession as agreeing with God about our sin (1 John 1:8-9).
- The seriousness of sin before a holy God.
- Forgiveness and fellowship resting on honest confession.
- The contrast between a culture of excuse and the way of confession.

Discussion Prompts

- What does Daniel's confession reveal about real honesty before God?
- Why is owning our sin without excuse essential to forgiveness?
- How does the culture's habit of excusing sin differ from confession?

Question 4

Student Question:

Daniel pleaded for mercy "not... because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy" (9:18). Where are you tempted to approach God on the basis of your own goodness or

performance rather than His mercy? How does resting in God's mercy rather than your own record change the way you come to Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question presses the basis on which we approach God. Daniel pleaded, “we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy” (9:18). The most righteous man in the Old Testament came to God not on the ground of his goodness but on the ground of God's mercy. This is the only ground any of us has.

Help students detect the subtle self-righteousness that creeps into our approach to God. We are tempted to feel that God owes us a hearing because we have been good, prayed enough, or earned His favor, and to feel that when we have failed, we have no right to come. Both are forms of approaching God on the basis of our own record rather than His mercy.

Offer the freedom of resting in mercy. If our access to God depended on our righteousness, we would never have confidence, for our righteousness is always mixed and partial. But because it rests on God's great mercy, supremely in Christ, we may come boldly even on our worst days (Hebrews 4:16). Mercy, not merit, is the ground of every approach to God.

Move toward a concrete shift. Encourage students to notice where they have been approaching God on the basis of their own performance, and to consciously come instead on the ground of His mercy in Christ. The aim is the humble confidence of one who knows he is welcomed not because he is good, but because God is merciful.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Approaching God on the ground of His mercy, not our righteousness (Daniel 9:18).
- The subtle self-righteousness that bases access to God on performance.
- Bold access to God resting on mercy, supremely in Christ (Hebrews 4:16).
- Humble confidence as the fruit of resting in mercy rather than merit.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to approach God on the basis of your own goodness?
- How does resting in God's mercy change the way you come to Him?
- How can you come to God boldly even on your worst days?

Question 5

Student Question:

Daniel appealed to God's own character and reputation, asking Him to act “for your own sake” and for the sake of His name on His city and people (9:17–19). What does it mean to pray for God's glory, that His name be honored, rather than only for our own benefit? How would your prayers change if God's glory were their deepest aim?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Focus on the God-centered aim of Daniel's prayer. He pleads, "O Lord, for your own sake... let your face shine upon your sanctuary... because your city and your people are called by your name" (9:17–19). Daniel's deepest concern is not merely the relief of his people but the honor of God's name. He asks God to act for His own sake and glory.

Help students see how this elevates prayer. Much of our praying is consumed with our own wants and comforts. Daniel models a higher aim: that God's name be honored, His glory displayed, His purposes advanced. This does not mean our needs are unimportant, but that they are taken up into a larger concern for God's glory.

Connect this to the pattern Jesus taught. The Lord's Prayer begins not with our needs but with God's name, kingdom, and will: "Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done" (Matthew 6:9–10). Only after God's glory is sought do we pray for daily bread. Daniel's prayer breathes the same priority, putting God's honor first.

Apply this to the reshaping of our prayers. When God's glory becomes the deepest aim of our praying, our requests are purified and reordered. We begin to want what God wants, to care about His name in our circumstances, and to find that even our own needs look different in the light of His glory. Prayer becomes worship, not just wishing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Praying for God's glory and the honor of His name (Daniel 9:17–19).
- The God-centered priority of the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9–10).
- Our needs taken up into the larger concern for God's glory.
- Prayer purified and reordered when God's glory is its aim.
- Prayer as worship, not merely the presentation of wants.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to pray for God's glory rather than only our benefit?
- How does the Lord's Prayer put God's name and kingdom first?
- How would your prayers change if God's glory were their deepest aim?

Question 6

Student Question:

It is easy for prayer to become a list of our wants. How can you cultivate a prayer life that is concerned first with God's name, God's glory, and God's purposes? What is one specific way you could begin praying more for God's honor and less only for your own comfort?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question applies the God-centered aim of prayer to the student's own habits. Honest reflection usually reveals that our prayers are dominated by our own wants, comfort, and concerns. The challenge is to cultivate a prayer life that is concerned first with God's name, glory, and purposes.

Help students see that this is a matter of training, not natural inclination. Self-centered prayer comes easily; God-centered prayer must be learned and practiced. One practical help is to begin prayer as Jesus taught, with God's name, kingdom, and will, before turning to personal requests, so that God's glory frames everything else.

Offer further practices: praying through Scripture, especially the prayers and praises of the Bible; praying for the advance of the gospel and the honor of God's name in our circumstances; and asking, before each request, how God might be glorified in the matter. These habits slowly reorient a self-centered heart.

Move toward one concrete step. Encourage students to choose a specific way to begin praying more for God's honor, perhaps adopting the order of the Lord's Prayer, or daily praying for God's name to be glorified in a particular situation. The aim is a prayer life increasingly centered on God rather than self.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God-centered prayer as a learned discipline, not a natural inclination.
- Framing prayer with God's name, kingdom, and will (Matthew 6:9–10).
- Praying Scripture and the advance of the gospel.
- The slow reorientation of a self-centered heart through practice.

Discussion Prompts

- How can you cultivate prayer concerned first with God's glory?
- What practices might reorient your prayers toward God's purposes?
- What is one concrete way to pray more for God's honor this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

While Daniel was still praying, Gabriel came to him and said he was “greatly loved” and that God had heard him from the first day he set his heart to understand (9:20–23). What does this reveal about God's eagerness to hear and answer the prayers of His people? How does it encourage you to know that God responds to His praying people because they are loved?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Turn to God's swift and tender response. “While I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel... came to me in swift flight... and said, O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and

understanding... for you are greatly loved" (9:20–23). God answered before Daniel had finished, and from the first day Daniel set his heart to understand, his words were heard.

Help students feel the eagerness of God to hear His people. Gabriel came "in swift flight"; the answer was already on its way while Daniel still prayed. This is not a reluctant God who must be cajoled into paying attention, but a Father who hears His children from the first moment they turn to Him. Heaven is not deaf or slow to His praying people.

Highlight the tender words "greatly loved." The reason God heard and answered was bound up with His love for Daniel. This is the ground of all confident prayer: we are heard not because we are eloquent or deserving, but because we are loved. The God to whom we pray delights in His people and welcomes their voices.

Apply this to the believer's confidence. In Christ, every believer is greatly loved, adopted as a child of God, and assured that the Father hears (1 John 5:14–15; Romans 8:15–16). The same eagerness Gabriel displayed toward Daniel reflects the heart of the God who invites us to come boldly and promises to hear. Our prayers ascend to a Father who loves to listen.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's eagerness to hear and answer His praying people (Daniel 9:20–23).
- The answer already on its way while Daniel still prayed.
- Being heard because we are loved, not because we are deserving.
- The believer's confident access as a beloved child of God (Romans 8:15–16).
- The Father who delights to hear His children (1 John 5:14–15).

Discussion Prompts

- What does Gabriel's swift coming reveal about God's eagerness to hear?
- Why does it matter that Daniel was told he was 'greatly loved'?
- How does being loved by God change the way you pray?

Question 8

Student Question:

Sometimes we pray as though we must convince a reluctant God to pay attention to us. How does the truth that you are loved by God, and that He hears you, change the way you approach Him in prayer? Where do you need to trade a fearful, distant view of God for confidence that your Father delights to hear you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question applies God's eagerness to hear against the fearful, distant view of God that many believers carry. Some pray as though they must overcome God's reluctance,

convince a distracted deity to notice them, or earn a hearing they are not sure they deserve. The truth of this chapter dismantles that picture.

Help students examine their own image of God in prayer. Do they come as to a loving Father who delights to hear, or as to a distant, reluctant judge who must be persuaded? Our practice of prayer is shaped powerfully by our picture of the God we pray to. A wrong picture breeds fear, distance, and prayerlessness.

Offer the corrective of the gospel. In Christ, we are not strangers begging an audience but children welcomed by a Father. We have received “the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba! Father” (Romans 8:15). We may “with confidence draw near to the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16). The God of Daniel 9 hears His loved ones gladly.

Move toward a concrete shift. Encourage students to identify where a fearful or distant view of God has hindered their prayers, and to come this week as a beloved child who is heard. The aim is to trade timid, doubtful praying for the confident, intimate prayer of those who know they are loved.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Trading a fearful, distant view of God for confidence in His love.
- Our picture of God shaping our practice of prayer.
- The Spirit of adoption enabling us to cry ‘Abba, Father’ (Romans 8:15).
- Confident access to the throne of grace in Christ (Hebrews 4:16).

Discussion Prompts

- Do you come to God as a loving Father or a reluctant judge?
- How does your picture of God shape the way you pray?
- Where do you need to trade fearful praying for confident trust?

Question 9

Student Question:

Gabriel reveals that the seventy weeks are decreed to “finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity,” and that the Anointed One “shall be cut off” (9:24, 9:26). How is this remarkable prophecy fulfilled in Jesus Christ, whose atoning death finished the work of dealing with sin and brought in everlasting righteousness? And why must we reject the dispensational “gap theory,” which detaches the seventieth week and projects it onto a future seven-year tribulation with a rebuilt temple and a personal Antichrist, when the prophecy itself reaches its goal in Christ’s first coming, His death, and the resulting end of the temple order (Matthew 27:50–51; Hebrews 9:11–12, 10:11–14)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the single heaviest doctrinal block in the entire study, and you must teach it with clarity and confidence. State the God-given center of the prophecy first, because Gabriel states it plainly: the seventy weeks are decreed “to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness” (9:24). These are not the language of politics or earthly kingdoms; they are the language of redemption. The seventy weeks reach their goal in the dealing-with-sin that only the cross accomplishes.

Show how the prophecy points unmistakably to Christ. The decreed purposes, to finish transgression, atone for iniquity, and bring everlasting righteousness, were accomplished in the atoning death of Jesus. And Gabriel names the means: “an anointed one (Messiah) shall be cut off and shall have nothing” (9:26). The Anointed One is cut off, that is, put to death, and by that death the work of dealing with sin is finished. This is a prophecy of the cross, given centuries in advance. When Jesus cried “It is finished” (John 19:30), the deepest purpose of the seventy weeks was accomplished.

Connect this to the end of the temple order. The prophecy also foretells that after the Anointed One is cut off, “the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary,” and the sacrifice and offering will be brought to an end (9:26–27). At the death of Jesus, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:50–51), signifying that the old sacrificial system had reached its God-appointed end, its purpose fulfilled in the one perfect sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 9:11–12; 10:11–14). The historical destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70 sealed that ending. The whole movement of the prophecy is toward Christ and the close of the old order, not toward a revived temple in the distant future.

Now name and reject the dispensational gap theory plainly and kindly, for this is the great abuse of the passage. That system takes the seventieth week, detaches it from the first sixty-nine, inserts a gap of now nearly two thousand years (the entire church age), and projects the final week onto a future seven-year tribulation, complete with a rebuilt Jerusalem temple, restored animal sacrifices, and a personal Antichrist who makes and breaks a covenant. Teach students that there is no biblical warrant for such a gap. The text presents the seventy weeks as a unified, continuous whole reaching its climax in the Messiah’s coming and being cut off. The gap theory must insert into the prophecy a parenthesis of thousands of years that the text never mentions, and it must reverse the New Testament’s clear teaching that the old sacrificial order has ended forever in Christ. To expect a future rebuilt temple with reinstated animal sacrifices is to contradict the book of Hebrews, which declares that Christ’s one offering has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified and that there is no longer any offering for sin (Hebrews 10:14, 10:18).

End by lifting students to the glory of the fulfilled prophecy. The seventy weeks are not a riddle awaiting a future tribulation timetable; they are a promise gloriously fulfilled at the cross. Everlasting righteousness has been brought in, sin has been atoned, transgression finished, by the Anointed One who was cut off for us. The right response to Daniel 9 is not anxious

calculation of end-times schedules but adoring rest in the finished work of Christ, in whom the deepest purpose of all redemptive history has been accomplished. That is the message Daniel was given, and it is the message every student needs to hear.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The God-given center of the prophecy: to finish transgression, end sin, atone for iniquity, bring everlasting righteousness (Daniel 9:24).
- The Anointed One 'cut off' as a prophecy of the atoning death of Christ (Daniel 9:26).
- The cross as the accomplishment of the seventy weeks' goal (John 19:30).
- The end of the temple sacrificial order, signified by the torn curtain and fulfilled in Christ's one offering (Matthew 27:50–51; Hebrews 9:11–12; 10:11–14).
- Rejection of the dispensational gap theory that detaches the seventieth week and inserts a multi-thousand-year parenthesis.
- Rejection of a future rebuilt temple with reinstated sacrifices, which contradicts Hebrews 10:14, 18.
- Adoring rest in the finished work of Christ as the right response to the prophecy.

Discussion Prompts

- How is the prophecy of the seventy weeks fulfilled in the death of Christ?
- What does the torn temple curtain signify about the old sacrificial order?
- Why must we reject the gap theory and a future rebuilt temple with sacrifices?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter, from Daniel's humble prayer to the promise of the Anointed One cut off for sin. Name one specific way the truth that Christ has finished the work of atonement, and that God hears His loved and praying people, is reshaping how you will pray, confess, and rest in His mercy this coming week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question calls for a personal, concrete response. The aim is to move students from understanding the prophecy to resting in the Christ to whom it points and praying like the man who received it. Ask them to look back across the chapter and name where the Spirit is pressing on them.

Help them gather the threads: prayer shaped by God's word, honest confession of sin, resting in God's mercy rather than our righteousness, praying for God's glory, coming to God as loved and heard, and resting in the finished atoning work of Christ. Ask which of these is speaking most directly to them.

Refuse vagueness. “Pray better” is not a plan. “This week I will confess this sin honestly, come to God on the ground of His mercy, or rest in the finished work of Christ instead of my own performance” is concrete and livable. The best answers will be specific and personal.

Close by lifting their eyes to the cross. The seventy weeks reached their goal when the Anointed One was cut off for us, finishing the work of atonement and bringing in everlasting righteousness. We pray, confess, and live not to earn God’s favor but in glad response to a work already finished by Christ, who is forming His own humility and confidence in us (Hebrews 10:14; Philippians 1:6).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The goal of study as humble prayer and rest in the finished work of Christ (Romans 8:29).
- Christ’s atonement as accomplished, not to be earned (Hebrews 10:14).
- Confession, mercy, and confident prayer as the response to grace.
- Concrete, named obedience as the fruit of genuine study.

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this chapter is God pressing most on your heart?
- What is one specific way you will pray or rest in God’s mercy this week?
- How does the finished work of Christ change the way you come to God?