

The Book of Daniel

Lesson 9: Daniel's Prayer and the Seventy Weeks -- Daniel 9:1-27

This chapter begins not with a vision but with an open Bible. Daniel, now an old man, is reading the scroll of Jeremiah, and he comes across a promise: that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. And Daniel does the math. The seventy years are nearly up. God's appointed time of restoration is at hand. But notice what this discovery produces in him. It does not make him passive, as though he could simply wait for prophecy to fulfill itself. It drives him to his knees. The nearness of God's promise becomes the fuel for one of the most beautiful prayers in all of Scripture.

And what a prayer it is. Daniel, who is perhaps the most blameless man in the Old Testament, the one even his enemies could find no fault in, does not pray as though he were better than his people. He prays "we." "We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled." He wraps himself up in the guilt of his nation and pleads for mercy, not on the basis of any righteousness of their own, but "on the ground of your great mercy." "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act." It is confession without excuse, and pleading without merit, the prayer of a man who knows both the holiness of God and the depth of human sin.

And while Daniel is still praying, while the words are still in his mouth, heaven answers. The angel Gabriel comes to him "in swift flight" and touches him and says, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding... for you are greatly loved." And then Gabriel gives him a prophecy so dense and so contested that people have argued over it for two thousand years: the prophecy of the seventy weeks. Seventy sevens are decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness.

We must handle this prophecy with great care, because it is one of the most important and most abused passages in the Bible. But its center is not in doubt, because Gabriel states it plainly: the seventy weeks reach their goal in the end of sin and the atoning of iniquity, accomplished when the Anointed One, the Messiah, "shall be cut off." This is a prophecy about the cross. Centuries before Calvary, Daniel was told that the deepest purpose of all redemptive history would be accomplished by an Anointed One who would be cut off for the sins of His people. This lesson is about that prayer and that promise, about a God who answers His people, and about the Christ in whom the whole sweep of prophecy finds its goal.

Group Discussion: Daniel discovered God's promise in Scripture and immediately turned to earnest prayer and confession (9:2-4). What does this teach us about the relationship between knowing God's word and praying? Why does a deeper grasp of God's promises lead the faithful not to passivity but to more fervent prayer?

Personal Reflection: Daniel, a remarkably godly man, confessed his nation's sin as his own, praying "we have sinned" rather than standing apart in self-righteousness (9:5). Where are you tempted to see yourself as standing above others, rather than identifying with them in humility? What would it look like to pray with Daniel's kind of honest, humble confession this week?

Read Daniel 9:1-27

Study Questions

1. 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)?
2. 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?
3. 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)?
4. 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?

5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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)?

10. 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.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: 1 John 1:8–9, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive; Daniel 9:24, the seventy weeks to finish transgression and atone for iniquity; Matthew 27:50–51, the temple curtain torn in two at the death of Jesus; Hebrews 9:11–12, Christ entering once for all by His own blood, securing eternal redemption; Hebrews 10:11–14, by one offering Christ has perfected for all time those being sanctified.

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