

The Book of Daniel

And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. (Daniel 1:20 ESV)

but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. (Daniel 2:28 ESV)

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (Daniel 12:2–3 ESV)

70 Weeks
March 8th, 2020
Daniel 9
Pastor Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Daniel 9.

Once again, I want to remind you that we are dealing with Apocalyptic literature. As Pastor Paul and I were talking about the passage this week, he reminded me that Apocalyptic literature is oftentimes referred to as the “playground of fools.” There are certain kinds of people who will LOSE themselves in the intricate details of these signs and visions and who will then miss the main point as a result.

My hope and prayer and AMBITION for us this morning, is that we will navigate all the way through the potential distractions in this text so as to see and savour the heart of this passage.

What we are looking at this morning is not a puzzle. It’s not a toy. It is the living and active Word of God and, I don’t know about you, but I don’t need any more novelty and distraction in my life – what I need is to hear GOD SPEAK. Amen? Amen.

So let’s look to the Word together. We’re going to divide today’s text into two sections. The first presents a prayer of repentance, and the second presents a promise of restoration. As we have done in previous weeks, we are going to walk through this text slowly, making sure that we understand each detail as it presents itself, then we’re going to pull back and consider the main theme. Look

with me now at Daniel, chapter 9. Hear now God's holy, inspired, living and active word to us today:

A Prayer Of Repentance

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—² in the first year of his reign, 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. (Daniel 9:1-2 ESV)

Okay, so let's stop right there and take note of an important detail that will prepare us to understand this chapter. Daniel is praying this prayer in the first year of the reign of Darius the Mede, AFTER the fall of Babylon.

When Daniel saw that the mighty Babylonian empire was no more, it immediately reminded him of something he had read in the Book of Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 25:11-13 we read:

This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and **these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.** ¹² Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste. ¹³ I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. (Jeremiah 25:11-13 ESV)

Are you seeing that? Daniel looked at his Bible, then he looked out the window and he saw that God was keeping His word. He DID use the Babylonians to make Jerusalem a ruin and a waste. He DID cause the people of God to live in servitude to the King of Babylon. And now, just like He said He would, God HAS punished the King of Babylon. Seeing all of this, Daniel fell to his knees in prayer. One commentator notes:

These verses show Daniel as a diligent student of Scripture who built his prayer life on the Word of God.¹

¹ Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Daniel – Minor Prophets)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 7, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 107.

That's what we see here. With the Bible in one hand, and the newspaper in another, Daniel is bringing his concerns to the God who has proven time and time again that He is Lord over history. Let's turn our attention now to Daniel's prayer. Look with me now at verse 3:

³ Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. ⁴ I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁵ we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. ⁶ We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. ⁷ To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. ⁸ To us, O Lord, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. ⁹ To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him ¹⁰ and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. ¹¹ All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him.

¹² He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity. For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem. ¹³ As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth. ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us, for the Lord our God is righteous in all the works that he has done, and we have not obeyed his voice. ¹⁵ And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly. (Daniel 9:3-15 ESV)

Let's pause here for a moment. Listen closely. Daniel is presenting a problem to the Lord, but the CRISIS that is at the front of Daniel's mind is not what you might expect from an exile living in a foreign land in the midst of political upheaval.

The crisis Daniel identifies is not the arrival of a new foreign king.

It's not the fact that he's still living in a foreign land.

Daniel rightly identifies the REAL crisis. At the root of Israel's problem was one thing. Sin. They didn't have a Babylon problem. They didn't have a Medo-Persia problem. They had a heart problem.

Daniel was a student of the Scriptures and he understood that Israel lived in a covenantal relationship with God. That relationship included expectations and parameters. We don't have time to delve into the intricacies of that relationship today but, to summarize it briefly, God said: "IF you will obey me and live faithfully with me THEN I will bless you, but IF you disobey me THEN I will curse you."

That was the deal. Those words IF and THEN are extremely important in a covenant relationship. Israel didn't need to GUESS how God was going to respond to them on a day to day basis. He had already told them exactly how He would respond. Look with me, for example, at Leviticus 26:27-28 where God warned the Israelites:

But **if** in spite of this you will not listen to me, but walk contrary to me, ²⁸ **then** I will walk contrary to you in fury, and I myself will discipline you sevenfold for your sins. (Leviticus 26:27-28 ESV)

THAT is what Daniel is seeing in the Babylonian exile. He saw God keeping His word, doing exactly what He promised He would do.

Therefore, Daniel understood that the ONLY way home was through repentance. The only hope that covenant breakers have is that the God on the other side of the covenant agreement will extend mercy! So that's exactly what Daniel asks for and that's where we pick up in verse 16:

¹⁶ "O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill, because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us. ¹⁷ Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. ¹⁸ O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. ¹⁹ O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name." (Daniel 9:16-19 ESV)

Let's stop there. This concludes Daniel's prayer of repentance. This sets the stage for the prophecy that we will find in the second half of chapter 9. Daniel is asking God to glorify His own name by showing mercy to people who don't deserve mercy. Daniel is asking God to find it upon himself to pick sinful, rebellious, law-breaking men and women up out of the mud and to restore them from their exile.

That's the request.

Verses 20-27 provide the answer. Look there with me now where we find a promise of restoration:

A Promise Of Restoration

²⁰ While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the Lord my God for the holy hill of my God,²¹ while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. ²² He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. ²³ At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision. (Daniel 9:20-23 ESV)

Let's just stop here very quickly and make an observation: The prayers of the saints matter!

God hears them. God responds to them. Your prayers mobilize heavenly armies!

God was not indifferent to Daniel. Even though Daniel had spent a lifetime in exile and had every reason to convince himself that he had somehow been forgotten, he is reminded here that he is "greatly loved." I suspect that some of us need that reminder today.

Now, before we move into verses 24-27, I want to warn you that these three verses are perhaps the most widely debated verses in the entire Bible. The debate and discussion surrounding these verses is ongoing and there is no real consensus as to exactly how we should understand some of the intricate details. Let me just say this: while there is room for interpretative differences on the minor details, the main message is CLEAR. So, let's carefully work our way through these verses, but let's make sure that we don't wind up missing the forest for the trees.

So, Daniel has prayed: "God, will you show mercy on Your people and return us from our exile?"

These next three verses provide God's answer to that request. Look with me now at verse 24:

²⁴ "Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. (Daniel 9:24 ESV)

It would probably be helpful to stop here and to note that the word translated as “weeks” in verse 24 is actually the Hebrew word for “sevens.” Remember, Daniel was meditating on Jeremiah’s prophecy when he began this prayer. Jeremiah said that the Babylonians would rise up in judgement for 70 years. Now, with the fall of Babylon, Daniel was wondering if that 70-year restoration plan was finished.

Gabriel comes to Daniel and says: “Yes. God is going to restore Israel, but the GREATER restoration that you need is not going to take 70 years. It is going to take 70 times 7.”

Now, this is where Bible scholars begin to diverge. Some argue that Gabriel has a literal 490 years in mind, and they take it upon themselves to calculate leap years and to study lunar calendars to make the 490-mark land on Jesus. With all due respect, I don’t think any of those brothers pulled out their calculators when they preached through Matthew 18. In Matthew 18:21-22 we read:

Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”

²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. (Matthew 18:21-22 NKJV)

I have never heard a preacher try to explain that Jesus is here putting a 490-count-limit on forgiveness. These are *symbolic* numbers. The number 7 is frequently used this way in the Bible. It is like a shorthand way of saying “the time of completion” and it traces back to the 7 days in the creation account. So, I think it’s best to understand that Gabriel is saying here that, yes, God is going to restore Israel from her exile, but that there is a *greater* return from exile that is needed. God’s ultimate plan for the restoration of Israel is a King who will:

- 1. Finish the transgression.**
- 2. Put an end to sin.**
- 3. Atonement for iniquity.**
- 4. Bring in everlasting righteousness.**
- 5. Seal both vision and prophet.**
- 6. Anoint a most holy place.**

When you lay it out like that, this mystery looks a little less mysterious, doesn't it? Those first four, in particular are obviously fulfilled in Christ. On the cross, Jesus took all of our sins upon himself and he said: "It is FINISHED!" He is the one who puts an end to sin. He is the one who makes atonement through his blood. He is the only one who can usher in everlasting righteousness.

Regarding the language of that fifth fulfillment, it is helpful to remember that the Bible uses the language of a "seal" to symbolize authentication or fulfillment. Jesus is certainly the authentication and fulfillment of all of the visions and prophecies of the Old Testament! In him, all the promises of God find their "yes" and "amen!"

The sixth item on that list trips some folks up. In your Bible, you likely have a little indication over the word "place" that points you to the bottom of your page where it says something like: "place, or thing, or one." That's because the Hebrew there is slightly ambiguous. Are we to look for an anointed place? Or an anointed person? Well, in Jesus we find BOTH, don't we? He is the anointed PERSON, and he is also the anointed PLACE. That's what he said in John 2:

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."²⁰ The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. (John 2:19-21 ESV)

So, in Jesus, we find the anointed one AND the anointed place. Gabriel is here telling Daniel that, not only is God going to restore the Israelites from their present exile, He has a plan to return them from their *ultimate* exile. But *that* plan is going to take a little longer to fulfill.

Now, in these final verses, Gabriel is going to break that 70 times 7 plan into three sections or fulfillments.

Let's jump back into the text at verse 25, where we find stage 1 of the plan:

²⁵ Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. (Daniel 9:25a ESV)

Okay, so here is the immediate answer to Daniel's prayer. Stage 1. Daniel wanted to go home from exile and Gabriel is telling him here that a prince, an anointed one, is going to rise up and send Israel home. And that is EXACTLY what happened. God raised up a prince named Cyrus in Persia just like Isaiah prophesied. Isaiah wrote:

who says of Cyrus, ‘**He is my shepherd,**
and he shall fulfill all my purpose’;
saying of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be built,’
and of the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid.’” (Isaiah 44:28 ESV)

So, Gabriel tells Daniel that his immediate request is going to be granted. “Good news, Daniel! Cyrus is coming and you’re going to get that return from exile that you’re asking for!” But Gabriel’s message didn’t stop there. Look back at the text with me where we are introduced to stage 2:

Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. ²⁶ And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. (Daniel 9:25b-26a ESV)

The temple is going to be rebuilt Daniel, but Jerusalem will be surrounded by trouble. This trouble will persist for a LONG time until another anointed one will come along, only this anointed one will be cut off. He will have nothing. This person sounds an awful lot like the suffering servant that we find in Isaiah, doesn’t he? In Isaiah 53, we read:

he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.
³ He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isaiah 53:2b-3 ESV)

So, Gabriel tells Daniel to keep an eye open for THAT man. When the anointed one who has nothing is cut off, pay attention! That will be stage 2. Following that, 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. (Daniel 9:26b ESV)

Some scholars understand this verse to be a reference to the coming of the final antichrist, but it seems more likely to me that this is a reference to the Roman general Titus who destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. This marks the end of stage 2 and introduces us to the 3rd and final stage. It also leads us to the most widely contested verse in this passage which reads:

²⁷ 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. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.” (Daniel 9:27 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

This final “week” refers to the time between Christ’s first and second coming. This final verse describes the days that we are living in right now. The enemy of our souls – the one who makes desolate – is operating with an extended chain. He is actively opposing the worship of God’s people and before Christ returns that opposition will be HEIGHTENED. This final week – this final stage in God’s plan to restore His people and to bring them home to Himself is going to be a BLOODY and PAINFUL ordeal. But, this final “week” also has an appointed end. We don’t know when that is – we don’t know when Christ will return – but when he does, our enemy will once and for all be silenced.

Did you get all of that? As I said, this is as complicated a passage as you will ever study. But the main point is clear, and that’s what we need to deal with today. I appreciate commentator Joyce Baldwin’s warning here. She says:

It is possible to be so preoccupied with numbers as to miss the essential truths which those numbers declare.²

So, let’s heed that warning today. Put your calculator away. Let’s not miss the main point because of our fascination with the peculiar. Instead, let’s ask the question: What are the warnings and implications for us today coming out of a text like this?

Warnings and Implications

First

1. Let your Bible and your newspaper inform your prayers

² Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Madison, WI: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 164.

Daniel had the Book of Jeremiah in one hand and the Medo-Persia Times in his other hand because he understood that the two were related. God is on the move in our world today. We need to know what's going on in the world so that we can hold it up to what God's Word says about our world. And then, we need to put all of that together and surrender it to the Lord in prayer. As one commentator notes:

But the fact that God has spoken through the prophets does not mean that all the believer does is sit, newspaper in hand, awaiting the outcome. The appropriate response to prophecy is prayer.³

I mentioned last week that God is doing a powerful work in China, and that the church there is facing fierce resistance. We ought to be watching that carefully and expectantly and we certainly ought to be praying for them.

But, on the flip side, I think we ought to be thinking Biblically about what God is doing here in Canada. Why is it that the enemy almost seems content to leave us alone? The consistent message of Daniel is that there is a spiritual enemy that opposes the purposes of God. If that is the case, then why is it that we are relatively unscathed? Here's a thought: Could it be that the church in North America has grown so fat and sleepy that the enemy has opted not to even waste his resources on us? Samuel Rutherford once said:

"Give me a roaring Devil rather than a sleeping one; for sleeping devils make me slumber, but roaring ones provoke me to run to my Master."⁴

I'm not saying that I am longing for persecution. I'm not. But I DO want to see the church of North America wake up from her slumber. And I do want a heart that runs to my Master, because the second implication in this text is that:

2. Jesus is the only one who can ultimately lead us home

We can't ignore the first 19 verses of this chapter in our interpretation of the final 3. In the first 19 verses, Daniel is confessing the sins of his people and asking God to lead them home. "We have

³ John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 263.

⁴ Quoted by Charles Spurgeon, *Sermons on Proverbs*, 195.

sinned!” he says. “We deserve every bit of this!” He’s looking at the sin of his people – he’s looking at the sin that has been festering in his church – and it is BAD. He sees that he and his people deserve every bit of judgement they’ve received AND MORE!

But, after acknowledging and OWNING all of that, he pleads for mercy.

For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but **because of your great mercy**. ¹⁹ O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. (Daniel 9:18b-19a ESV)

Not because of who I am, but because of who you are. Not because of what we have done, but because of your great mercy. Hear. Forgive. Act.

Daniel wanted to come home, and he knew that it was sin that had led he and his people into the wilderness.

And, in this beautiful prophecy, God tells Daniel that there is a plan in motion to bring God’s people home. But his plan was more than anything Daniel could have imagined.

Have you ever heard that saying “Home is where the heart is”? Well, what Daniel didn’t fully understand was that, even after the return to Jerusalem, God’s people would still be “in exile” because their hearts were dragging them to forbidden lands. In order to finally come “home” the Israelites needed a new heart.

And so do you. And so do I.

The “home” that you and I long for is a place that we cannot get to for as long as we are carrying our sin. We need a way to be free from that sin. Therefore, Gabriel told Daniel that God was going to send someone:

to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. (Daniel 9:24b ESV)

And that someone is Jesus, the Son of God, who willingly entered into the seeming chaos of human history so that we could finally come home. In his life, death and resurrection he did all that he promised he would do in Daniel 9. He finished the transgression. He put an end to sin. He atoned for our iniquity. He brought everlasting righteousness. He sealed – he fulfilled – the visions and the prophecies. He anointed a most holy place.

And he will come again to once and for all put an end to the Desolator. But, our final warning in this text reminds us:

3. This restoration mission will not be without blood

²⁷ 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. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.” (Daniel 9:27 ESV)

God is going to bring you home, Daniel. More than that, God is going to bring you ALL THE WAY HOME.

But the road home is a painful road. This world with devils filled will threaten to undo you. Through many dangers, toils and snares you will come. There is a lion prowling about, seeking to steal, to kill, and to destroy. He’s on a chain, make no mistake! But the sight of him will cause many to fall away. The sight of him HAS caused many to fall away.

Jesus said:

From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. (Matthew 11:12 ESV)

Daniel 9 offers a startling message to a sleeping church: No one will sleep-walk their way into heaven. The victory is insured, but there are still some battles left to face, and there is still some blood left to be spilled. The road home is a road marked with sacrifice.

This is the cost of discipleship. This is the way home. And this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.