

PRAYING OVER THE EVERLASTING COVENANT

The prophecy of Daniel 9 begins with one of the longest prayers recorded in the Bible. It is also a beautiful prayer because it is so unselfish. Daniel prays—not for blessings for himself, but for his people. He intercedes with God for the remnant of Judah which is still living in exile in Babylon.

As he prayed, Daniel had the scroll of the prophet Jeremiah in mind, especially the portion we call chapter 25. There Daniel read Jeremiah's prophecy that the exile of Judah in Babylon would last seventy years (see Jeremiah 25:10–14; Daniel 9:1-3). He knew those seventy years were almost over.

Three different times Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had besieged Jerusalem—first in 605 B. C., then again in 597, and finally in 589-586. Each time he took captives back to Babylon. Daniel went with the first group in 605 B. C. By the time Babylon fell to the Persians, Daniel himself had been in Babylon almost seventy years. No wonder his prayers took on a note of urgency as he saw the predicted time period drawing rapidly to a close.

In response to Daniel's prayer, the angel Gabriel was sent to reassure the prophet that God's answer was yes! "Yes," Gabriel promised Daniel, "your people will go home to their own land. Yes, they will rebuild Jerusalem and its temple."

But God's answer to Daniel went beyond the immediate future. "God is telling you more," Gabriel continued. He wants to tell you what is going to happen to your people a long time after that restoration. He wants to tell you about the Messiah—when He will come, what He will do, and what will happen to Him. God wants to tell you how your people will respond to the Messiah who will come and what will happen to them as a result."

All this God made known to His prophet Daniel, and that revelation is the content of the prophecy of chapter 9.

Daniel 9:1. "In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans." This chapter is dated to 538 B.C., the first year of Darius the Mede. He is likely the same as King Cyrus the Great. The same Lord who delivered Jerusalem into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar's hand was at work in bringing Cyrus to power. "The Lord has stirred up the kings of the Medes, because His purpose is to destroy

Babylon” (Jer. 51:11, 28; cp. Isa. 13:17). Of his conquest the “Cyrus Cylinder” records “I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, mighty king, king of Babylon. . . . When I entered Babylon in a peaceful manner, I took up my lordly reign in the royal palace. . . .”

Daniel 9:2. “In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD [Yahweh, God’s personal name meaning “I am” the self-existent one, the frequently used title of God when speaking of His covenant.] came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.” Because of Israel’s unbelief in God’s promise of His everlasting covenant they trusted in themselves to keep God’s law. The result was gross wickedness. God’s covenant for Israel was to be a blessing, but their old covenant promises brought curses upon themselves and the land.

This transition of power from Babylon to the Medes and Persians, raised Jewish hopes that the land of Judah which had been polluted by idolatry and subsequently made desolate, thus enjoying its Sabbath rests from people’s sins, would be restored to the people of God. “This is what the LORD says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you’” (Jer. 29:10, 11). Daniel the prophet was studying the writings of his contemporary, Jeremiah the prophet, seeking understanding of the prophecy of the seventy years. The period of seventy years equals ten sabbatical cycles, during which, “the land enjoyed its Sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah” (2 Chron. 36:21). At the end of every sabbatical year, in the month Tishri [October], the covenant was remembered by Israel (Deut. 31:10-13).

Daniel 9:3. “And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes.” Daniel was praying over an open Bible. Sackcloth was a rough coarse cloth made of the hair of an animal such as goat or camel and worn around one’s waist, while (cold) ashes were placed on one’s head as symbols of mourning over the destruction of Jerusalem. It is entirely possible that Daniel may have observed the Day of Atonement with fasting and prayer.

Long before Moses had instructed Israel should they find themselves in exile, “If from there [the land of exile] you seek the

LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut. 4:29). Physical necessities faded for Daniel in comparison with his spiritual condition and that of his people.

Daniel 9:4. “And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love Him, and to them that keep His commandments.”

Daniel appeals to Yahweh on the basis of His promise-covenant. God has kept [*shamar*, to guard or cherish] His covenant. God’s very nature is deserving reverential awe—a heart appreciation of His faithfulness to save and deliver in the covenant and His “mercy” [*hesed*, “steadfast love”] creates love for Him. This wonderful gospel confession by Daniel indicates his understanding of the everlasting covenant.

To love God is to “keep His commandments.” “Keep” is *shamar*, indicating “to cherish His commandments.” God’s covenant is the gift of Christ whose will is to do His Father’s commandments. Those who have a heart appreciation to love God, cherish His commandments as given them in Christ, thus those principles are written in their hearts and minds (characters). Thus there is no legalism in God’s covenant of love; because the law is His ten promises to the believer. When God gives the promise and does the writing of the law there is no legalism involved.

Daniel 9:5. “We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments.”

As Daniel speaks in the first person plural he identifies himself with the sinful people. We have aimed our arrows at the bull’s eye and missed the mark. We have done wrong, the opposite of doing right and straight principles. We have acted wickedly. We have broken out in rebellion against God’s love and authority. We have turned away from God’s ten promises and social justice necessitating repentance.

By taking his people’s sins upon himself, Daniel was experiencing a repentance for the sins of others, as though they were his sins (he had not joined in their apostasy!). This is the kind of repentance that Jesus experienced in our behalf. When He came to John the Baptist requesting baptism, John refused Him, for he knew that Jesus was sinless. But Jesus had to explain to him that He has come as “the Lamb of God” taking upon Himself the sins of the entire human race.

He is to “be made sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21). John was not permitted to baptize anyone except “for repentance.” This repentance that Jesus experienced in our behalf was a corporate repentance—repenting for the sins of others, putting Himself in our place. As soon as we begin confessing “our” sin as Daniel did, realizing that the sin of others would be our sin, but for the grace of Christ, revival and refreshing of the Holy Spirit will sweep through God’s people.

Daniel 9:6. “Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.”

The cause for such unbelief and consequent sin is a failure to listen [*shamar*] to God’s messengers, the prophets, who speak for God. A similar situation exists for God’s people today who will not listen to the Lord’s servants, His modern-day messengers. The people have followed their leaders. National apostasy has led to national ruin—desolations and exile.

Daniel 9:7. “O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee.”

Moral rectitude (righteousness) is exclusive to God. Embarrassment and shame of face are the legacy of the whole household of God’s people. God has given the land a rest from their sins and given them a time-out as aliens in foreign lands. First, Israel was carried away by the Assyrians and then Judah by Nebuchadnezzar on three separate occasions. They have acted treacherously toward God and man in contrast to the actions of God.

Daniel 9:8. “O LORD [Yahweh], to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee.”

They had been scattered in exile throughout the nations of the ancient world. And worse, the inhabitants of these pagan lands knew why God’s people had been scattered. The Hebrews and their God had become a byword for shame in the ancient world. Our failures and sins have repercussions as well—on ourselves and on our God.

Daniel 9:9. “To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him.”

God's mercies or compassion comes from the bowels or intestines the seat of His emotions. His "forgivenesses" is pardon. This is God's justification of the ungodly.

Daniel 9:10. "Neither have we obeyed [*shamar*, to listen] the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets."

Failure to listen to God's voice through the prophets who "forthtell" His message, has resulted in walking our own self-directed paths. Walking is a common metaphor for living. The Torah or instruction is presented as a straight line in which the righteous walk.

Daniel 9:11. "Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against Him."

Their unfaithfulness had laid them open to receive the curses contained in the law of Moses for those who fail to listen. These are found especially in Deuteronomy chapters 26 through 33. Moses pointed out that the people would be blessed in believing these ten promises from God, but that the curses would fall upon them as a result of trusting in their own promises to obey.

Daniel 9:12. "And He hath confirmed His words, which He spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem."

This is the outworking of the principle that there are natural consequences that result from unbelief. But it is also a function of God's judgment against sin. Daniel saw the inexorable outworking of these principles in the fate of the people of Judah as they suffered exile in foreign lands.

We, too, receive the results of our unbelief today. As an example, lung cancer can be traced directly to smoking in the vast majority of cases. By smoking, one runs the risk of developing cancer because he or she is introducing a carcinogen into the bronchial tree. Similar effects operate in the spiritual realm as well. In other cases, such as Job's, no direct cause can be determined for calamities that befall us. But regardless of the situation, we can know that a loving and forgiving God draws us with His love by appealing to us to return to Him in repentance.

Daniel 9:13. "As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth."

Daniel 9:14. "Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God is righteous in all His works which He doeth: for we obeyed not His voice."

The Lord has kept a vigil-watch. "I am watching over them for harm, not for good" (Jer. 44:27a). The full display of divine judgment has the purpose of waking them up, calling them to faith in God's promise and love—the true motivation for obedience. The Lord is leading them back to Himself. In Him alone is to be found the righteous requirements of the law.

Daniel 9:15. "And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly."

As their intercessor, Daniel once again draws on God's mighty acts as the ground for his appeal (verses 15, 16). He reflects back on the experience of the Exodus from Egypt in which God brought His people out with a mighty hand. Covenant making in the ancient world always began with an introduction that recounted the story of past relations between the two covenanting parties. Following this structure, Daniel "reminds" God of these events. He admits that such gracious acts by God in the past should have motivated the people to loving heart appreciation. He admits their ingratitude and faithlessness in the light of God's great love for them and their fathers.

As we look back on the loving, gracious way God has led us in our personal lives, we should be motivated as well to serve Him and love Him. We need to express in our prayers a recognition of all that God has done for us and admit how often we have failed to respond in love.

We have the privilege of looking back upon Jesus' cross. He died an eternal death for our sins. This is our motivation for repentance from sin.

Daniel 9:16. "O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us."

God never turns a deaf ear to a heartfelt repentance and turning to Him. Daniel repents on behalf of himself and the people. God's anger and fury is compared to "your nose and your burning heat." Since a person who is angry tends to breathe hard through the nose, ancient Hebrews often pictured one's great anger as smoke rising from heat. God's jealousy is aroused because of Israel's unfaithfulness in the covenant and thus His anger, because they have gone after false gods. God acts as any husband would toward an unfaithful spouse who goes after an interfering lover.

Daniel 9:17. "Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake."

God's own reputation is at stake. A continuous punishment of Israel is having a negative impact on the reputation of God's name on earth. The temple in Jerusalem lays in ruins. Cause your face to shine upon the desolate sanctuary. Look with favor upon your house. The nations are inclined to view God as powerless in the face of opposition. May He vindicate His own cause.

Daniel 9:18. "O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies."

The honor of God is at stake in the world in our day as well as in Daniel's. We all play a part in the great controversy, and we have an obligation to bring praise and glory to our heavenly Father. It is difficult to avoid selfish prayers, but we need to have a larger view, praying not just for ourselves and our families, but for the honor of God. Jesus put it this way in His Sermon on the Mount: "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Our lives should be lived in such a way that God's name is praised.

Daniel 9:19. "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name."

Daniel appeals to the love and mercy of God that formed the basis of forgiveness. By forgiving the unworthy, undeserving people of Judah, God would cause His name to be honored among all the nations of the world. People everywhere would realize how great and merciful He really is.

Daniel pleads a reason that at present moves only a few of God's people to pray. Not for their own personal or selfish benefit, but that the Lord's name may be honored and glorified before the world, Daniel pleads that the Lord may have mercy upon Jerusalem. Moses used the same argument in pleading for Israel (Numbers 14:11-19). As we near the end, this paradigm shift in motivation will more and more impress God's people.

Daniel 9:20. "And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God."

His request is granted—Gabriel, the angel interpreter from the previous vision, comes to him in swift flight while he is still praying.

Daniel 9:21. "Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation."

Gabriel informs Daniel that an answer to his petition was given in heaven as soon as he began to pray. God's messengers are portrayed as looking like human beings. Gabriel, the man, means an individual or a person.

Can we now have a doubt, that the Lord hears prayer? Does He notice the wants of His humble child? No sooner does Daniel's prayer begin to ascend to heaven, than the command is issued to the mighty angel to "fly swiftly" to his help! There is no loitering in the "offices" of Heaven. "The first faint whisper of want by the child of God is instantly lodged upon the throne." Swifter than an e-mail, the answer comes "as the appearance of a flash of lightning" (Ezekiel 1:14). Trembling child, have faith in God!

Gabriel's message related directly to the vision described in the previous chapter 8. This is evident from the fact that Daniel referred to Gabriel as the one he "had seen in the earlier vision."

Daniel 9:22. "And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding."

He came to instruct Daniel.

Daniel 9:23. "At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision."

Daniel was an aged warrior for God. He was almost ninety years old at this time. One might think he was of little usefulness to God at such

an age. On the contrary, he was still “highly esteemed.” This should give encouragement to those who are advanced in years. God still takes note of the elderly and cares for them. He holds us each in high esteem; we are greatly beloved by the God of the universe!

What made Daniel to be “greatly beloved”? Does God have some favorite people whom He loves more than others? No, for Christ gave His blood for all of us equally. He did something for the entire human race. He has redeemed us all. If He died to save the world, He has given the gift of salvation to the world—but it’s a gift that has to be received by faith. By His sacrifice on His cross, the Son of God has given the gift of justification to “every man,” but you can do like Esau did who “had” the “birthright” but “despised” it and “sold” it (Genesis 25:33, 34; Hebrews 12:16, 17). Paul makes clear that what Christ did for humanity was more than make them a mere “offer.” Five times in one short passage he declares that Christ gave us a “free gift” of justification (Romans 5:14-18).

Daniel believed this “Good News” and chose to respond. For him Christ’s legal justification became the experience of justification by faith. This is what made him obedient. What the angel says to Daniel, he says to you also. Besides, saying, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,” say, “God so loved me. . . .”

What “matter,” what vision,” is the angel to explain to Daniel? It is a vision that Daniel has already received, for the angel commands him, “Understand the matter, and consider the vision.”¹ This vision can be

¹ In English, we have only one word for “vision” in this chapter. But in the Hebrew, the language of Daniel, there are two words: *chazon* means only a prophetic vision where the prophet sees action that is symbolically meaningful, such as the beasts and the horns. The other word for “vision” is *mareh*, which means literally “an appearance” and refers to what is ordinarily seen of people or of angels. In Daniel 8:1, 2, 15, *chazon* is used to refer to the prophetic action Daniel witnessed of the ram, the he goat, and then the little horn waxing “exceeding great.” The second word, *mareh*, is used of the conversation he heard and witnessed of the two heavenly beings (verses 13, 14) when they asked, “How long” would the desolation of the “daily” and the “transgression of desolation” last? The answer came, “Unto two thousand three hundred days . . .” In Daniel 8:26 the angel referred to this, saying, “And the vision [*mareh*] of the evenings and the morning [2300 days] is true.” Daniel adds in verse 27, “I was astonished at the *mareh*, but none understood it.” In other words, Gabriel explained the meaning of the “*chazon* vision,” but did not explain the *mareh* vision of the 2300 days. When he returns in Daniel 9, he says to Daniel: “Understand the matter and consider the *mareh*.” Then he proceeds to tell of the

no other than the vision of chapter 8, which the angel was never able to finish explaining to Daniel, because he fainted (Daniel 8:27). All had been satisfactorily explained at that time, except the strange word about the “two thousand three hundred days,” and the sanctuary. The angel now begins where he left off in chapter 8, verse 26.²

The time for the final deliverance of God’s people from this world of sin is just before us! Where are the Daniels of our day who are earnestly searching the Scriptures with fasting and humiliation, seeking God for light and guidance? Those who follow Daniel’s example will be taught of God through His Word, and by His Spirit. You are called to be among them.

seventy weeks. Thus it is clear that the seventy weeks are an explanation of the 2300 days, and belong to them being cleansed. The angel now begins where he left off in chapter 8, verse 26.

² The original Hebrew Old Testament was not divided into paragraphs or even verses as in our modern Bibles. The marking of the verses and paragraphs has been done by the translators as they saw fit. The translators have not always understood the real meaning of these prophecies.