

LESSON 27

CHAPTER 9

Daniel 9:1-2

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; 2 In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

This vision was received by Daniel during the first year of Darius' reign. As we have suggested, Darius was most likely a governor that Cyrus placed over the newly conquered Chaldean territory, but he may have been Cyrus himself. Either way, the first year of his reign would have been the first year of the Persian rule over the Chaldeans, which began in 539 BC.

Verse 1, which says that Darius was **made** king over the newly conquered realm of the Chaldeans, is the best evidence that Darius was a governor under Cyrus rather

than Cyrus himself (unless the “made” refers to God making him king, which means it could still be Cyrus).

Chapter 10 will begin “in the **third** year of Cyrus king of Persia,” and Chapter 11 will begin “in the **first** year of Darius the Mede” (as does this chapter). It might seem odd at first that Daniel would use both names to refer to a single person, but Cyrus would not be the only person in this book with two names. In fact, it seems to be the norm in this book (written in two languages!) for people to have two names!

By this time, as we have been with Daniel all the way from age 13 to age 80, we likely have a question for him — what is your secret, Daniel? How were you able to remain so faithful to God for so long? How were you able to speak truth to power so courageously in the presence of kings? How were you able to remain faithful as a teenage exile in a foreign land? What is your secret? The answer is that it was no secret at all. What is Daniel doing in verse 2? He is studying his Bible, and in verse 4 we will see him praying to God. Daniel’s “secret” was prayer and Bible study. It was speaking to God in prayer and listening to God in his word. Are we looking for modern day Daniels? Look for those Christians who focus on prayer and Bible study. Do I want to be a Daniel? Then I need to pick up my Bible and get on my knees. That is how Daniel himself became a Daniel!

And notice that prayer cannot be divorced from Bible study. In 1 John 5:14 we read that “this is the confidence that we have in him, that, **if we ask any thing according to his will**, he heareth us.” How can we know that we are asking for something according to God’s will if we are ignorant of God’s will? And how do we learn about God’s will? From God’s word. Prayer and Bible study must always go together.

Notice, also, that although Daniel was a prophet himself, he found it important to read and study the written word. We are **not** prophets. How much more important a role should Bible study play in our lives!

Daniel was a prophet, and yet Daniel was a student of the written word. And Daniel was not alone among the prophets in that.

1 Peter 1:10 — *Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently.*

And Daniel, at age 80, did not think that he had nothing left to learn! He continued to study God's word throughout his entire life.

What was Daniel studying? Verse 2 tells he was studying the writings of Jeremiah. Notice that Daniel already knew that the book of Jeremiah was an inspired message from God even though Jeremiah had died just a few decades earlier. Daniel did not need to wait around to hear from some counsel that Jeremiah belonged in the inspired canon. Daniel knew that it did, and Daniel calls it "the word of the Lord" in verse 2. God gave us his word; it did not come from any counsel of men. Those counsels may have **recognized** the inspired word, but they did not determine or create the inspired word.

What part of Jeremiah was Daniel reading? The reference to 70 years in verse 2 helps us pinpoint it.

Jeremiah 25:11 — *And this whole land shall be a **desolation**, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon **seventy years**.*

Notice that word "desolation" — it is a key word in this chapter.

Jeremiah 29:10 — *For thus saith the Lord, That after **seventy years** be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.*

Stop and think about verse 2 the next time you are reading Jeremiah — Daniel was reading that same text 2500 years ago! Our Bible is a link to the past. When we read Isaiah, we can think of Jesus being handed that Isaiah scroll in Luke 4. We can think

of the books and the parchments that Paul asked for in 2 Timothy. And we can think of Daniel reading Jeremiah. The Bible is our connection to the people of God throughout history.

These passages from Jeremiah speak of 70 years of Babylonian captivity. Is this a *literal* 70 years? Some believe that the 70 year figure here is symbolic, with seven denoting the perfection of God's work and ten denoting the completeness of the punishment. (If instead 70 is literal, then there is almost certainly a symbolic reason why God chose 70. The number was determined by God; it was not chosen at random!)

Other commentators suggest that the 70 years is being used here just to denote the length of a normal life span. That is, the exile will last about the length of a normal lifespan.

Psalm 90:10 — *The days of our years are **threescore years and ten**; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.*

Isaiah 23:15 — *And it shall come to pass in that day, that Tyre shall be forgotten **seventy years, according to the days of one king**: after the end of seventy years shall Tyre sing as an harlot.*

A problem with these theories (that 70 is figurative or just a normal lifespan) is that Daniel knew how long he had been in captivity, and the prayer that follows in this chapter suggests that Daniel believed about 70 years had passed. That is, he seems to have been watching the clock. I think there must be a literal meaning to the 70 years from Jeremiah's prophecies (in addition to a likely figurative reason why God chose 70 years).

If the 70 year figure is to be taken literally, then to what period does it refer? There are several theories.

Theory #1: The first deportation likely occurred in 605 BC. If we count out 70 years from the date, we get 535 BC, which is the year when, some suggest, the first exiles finally returned to Jerusalem. Remember that Chapter 9 is dated around 539 BC, a few years before 535 BC.

Theory #2: Others start the clock in 586 BC, when the temple was destroyed. Counting 70 years from that year brings us to 516 BC, which they say was when the temple was rebuilt. But this view would mean that, instead of being just a few years away from the 70 year fulfillment, Daniel in Chapter 9 would have been over twenty years away from its fulfillment. I don't see how Daniel could have possibly understood Jeremiah to mean 70 years from 586 BC.

The better view is the first view. Jeremiah's 70 year clock began with the first deportation in 605 BC. By the time of Chapter 9, in 539 BC, 66 years had passed. Daniel reads Jeremiah and realizes that the time of exile is almost over. When we get to Daniel's prayer, we will see that a theme of that prayer is "hurry up!" (verse 19). Daniel was not planning to return himself, or at least there is no evidence that he did, but he wanted his fellow exiles — most of whom had never seen their homeland — to return and rebuild the city and the temple soon. Daniel must have wondered how it would occur. The Persians had just replaced the Chaldeans, but so far there had been no change in the Jews' situation. But Daniel knew, with his eye of faith, that it would happen!

We saw the word "desolation" in the verses that Daniel was reading from Jeremiah. We also see that word in verse 2 of this chapter, where Daniel quotes Jeremiah. The word "desolation" occurs eight times in the closing five chapters of Daniel, and we also see that same word in Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14, where Jesus refers to Daniel in describing the judgment of Jerusalem in AD 70.

In Daniel the word "desolation" is used in two ways — first, to describe the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem by Rome (Daniel 9:27 and Daniel 12:11) and, second, to de-

scribe the desecration of the temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the second century BC (Daniel 8:13 and Daniel 11:31).

What does the word “desolation” mean? We all know the dictionary definition: laying waste; rendering uninhabitable; making unfit for habitation, wasted, or ruined; wretchedness; grief. Why is that word important? Because desolation is the end that awaits anyone who is apart from God, and the Jews, God’s chosen people, had been on that sad path prior to their exile. They were heading for desolation, and that desolation occurred when the Babylonians captured the city, exiled the people, and finally destroyed the temple. There would be repentance later under Ezra and Nehemiah, but once again the people would reject their covenant relation with God, and once again there would be a desolation — this time under Antiochus and the Greeks. Again, there would be repentance (under the Maccabees), but it would not last. God’s own people rejected God’s only begotten son, and the desolation that would follow from that would be final — and it came not at the hand of the Babylonians or the Greeks, but at the hand of the Romans. God provided a way of escape for the faithful remnant, but there was only desolation for the others. And if you are counting, that final desolation was the third desolation. God’s long suffering toward the Jews came to an end in AD 70.

That word “desolation” is important, because that one word tells us what the 70 week prophecy at the end of this chapter means (which we will study in depth shortly). Listen as Jesus tells us what desolation means, in one of the most heart-breaking passages from the New Testament, particularly to students of the Old Testament:

Matthew 23:37-38 — *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you **desolate**.*

That in a nutshell is the message of Chapter 9 and the meaning of the prophecy that ends this chapter. When you read commentaries that spin off in a thousand different directions with a thousand different wild theories about the 70 weeks, keep the word “desolation” in mind — and read Matthew 23 and 24. Jesus himself ties Matthew 24 to specific prophecies in Daniel — and Matthew 24:34 tells us that those prophecies were fulfilled in the first century. (Always look for the time frame! If you miss that, you will miss everything.)

Daniel 9:3

3 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

One commentator wrote:

Daniel’s prayer in this chapter ranks as one of the finest in Biblical literature. Unfortunately, because of the tremendous impact of the prediction found at the conclusion of Chapter 9, the prayer in the opening section has received scant attention.

If so, that is very sad. Verse 3 tells us something very important about Daniel, and something that we should have already known about Daniel — Daniel took prayer very seriously. If we want to be like Daniel, then we should also take prayer very seriously.

Karl Barth: To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.

Samuel Chadwick: The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless

work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.

Alan Redpath: Much of our praying is just asking God to bless some folks that are ill and to keep us plugging along. But prayer is not prattle: prayer is warfare.

Yes, the prayer in verses 4–19 is for a specific time and a specific situation, but it can also teach us much about prayer and can show us how a true servant of God should approach the Sovereign of the Universe on behalf of his people — something that we should also be praying for daily.

Notice from verse 3 the spiritual preparation that Daniel went through before he even began to pray. He fasted, mourned (ashes), and clothed himself with sack-cloth. Yes, we are to pray without ceasing, and yes, we are to be instant in prayer, but prayer requires preparation, and particularly the type of focused petitionary, confessionary prayer that we are about to see from Daniel. Daniel did not approach the throne of God flippantly or casually.

One attitude we see very clearly in Daniel’s prayer is his **earnestness**. His prayer was fervent and impassioned. We see the most extreme earnestness in the prayer of Christ in the garden.

Luke 22:44 — *And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

And we see it in the church’s prayers for Peter.

Acts 12:5 — *Peter therefore was kept in the prison: but prayer was made earnestly of the church unto God for him.*
[ASV]

James 5:16 tells us that an effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, and James points to Elijah as an example of someone who prayed earnestly. He could have just as easily used Daniel as an example. As one author has written:

This should be our attitude as we pray. So often earnestness is missing from our prayers. They seem so rote, so mechanical, without passion.

How can we maintain earnestness in our prayers? Perhaps the writer of Hebrews gives us the answer.

Hebrews 13:3 — *Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.*

The earnestness of prayer returns when we pray for people as though we were in their same situation — because when we actually find ourselves in that situation, earnestness in prayer is rarely a problem!

The attitude of Daniel shows us that we should come into the presence of the Lord with an earnestness that storms the gates of Heaven, but a humility that realizes that he is sovereign and we are sinful.

Daniel's Prayer

The first time I taught Daniel, I divided this prayer up into subsections and read and commented on each subsection separately, as we have been doing all throughout our study of this book. But I think that was a mistake for this prayer. (That which we dissect, we kill!) To really see this prayer, we need to see it all at once. We need to hear it from start to finish as Daniel prayed it. So before we talk about it, I want to read the entire prayer in verses 4-19. But you have an assignment while I read!

First, think back and imagine Daniel praying alone in his upper chamber. Think about the great historic event that had just occurred — the overthrow of Babylon

by the Persians. But think about what was happening behind the scenes, and about God, who was in complete control of what was going on. Daniel knew that God was in control. What was the greatest historical force of the time? The great Persian army? The mighty Babylonian army? Or was it perhaps the eighty year old Daniel praying alone in his room? I think we all know the answer to that question! John Knox was a man famous for his power in prayer, and Queen Mary of England used to say that she feared his prayer more than all the armies of Europe. How powerful is prayer? Prayer can do anything that God can do.

Second, notice the *pronouns* that Daniel uses in his prayer — pronouns for God, pronouns for himself, and pronouns for the people.

Third, notice Daniel's *concerns* in his prayer. Who is Daniel most concerned about? Who is Daniel *not* concerned about?

Fourth, notice Daniel's *requests* in his prayer. What does he request? What does he *not* request?

Fifth, notice Daniel's use of Scripture in his prayer.

Sixth, look for the word "desolation," and also for the word "covenant."

Daniel 9:4-19

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; 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: 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. 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. 8 O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. 9 To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; 10 Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. 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, be-

cause we have sinned against him. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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.

Verses 4-6

Perhaps the first thing we notice in this prayer is that there is absolutely no evasion. Daniel confesses his own personal guilt and the guilt of the entire Jewish nation. He makes no excuses — the Jews deserved their punishment.

Daniel loved his people, but he knew that they had turned away from God despite his repeated warnings and mercy. They had forsaken the law; they had embraced idols; they had killed the prophets that God had sent to warn them. They were without excuse.

2 Chronicles 36:16 — *But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until*

the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.

And Daniel holds nothing back. Seven different aspects of Israel's sin are set forth in verses 5-6. Israel had "sinned," "committed iniquity," "done wickedly," "rebelled," departed from God's precepts, departed from God's judgments, and had not "hearkened unto thy servants the prophet." Daniel knew exactly why he and his people were in exile.

The mention of the covenant in verse 4 is important. The prophets had long tried to bring the people back into their covenant relationship with God. The people, however, thought that they would be safe so long as God's temple was in their city. That is the attitude that Jeremiah spoke against in the temple sermon of Jeremiah 7:1-29.

Jeremiah 7:4 — *Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these.*

But something had happened that the people did not ever dream would happen — God had abandoned his temple, as we see in Ezekiel 9-11.

Ezekiel 11:23 — *And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city.*

Daniel knew what had happened, and Daniel knew what had caused it to happen.

But notice that when Daniel prayed for his people, confessing the sin that caused God to punish them by the deportation, he did not distance himself from his people. Instead, Daniel identified himself with them in his confession of sin. Notice how Daniel uses the first person plural pronoun.

- **Verse 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.*
- **Verse 6:** *Neither have **we** hearkened unto thy servants the prophets.*

• **Verse 8:** *We have sinned against thee.*

And the same continues throughout the remainder of the prayer. When we confess sin, we sometimes have a tendency to confess the sins of other people, or if we do not do that, we sometimes confess sin in a manner meant to excuse ourselves. Daniel was not like that. (The Pharisee was like that when he thanked God that he was not like those other people!)

If anyone could have pointed a finger at others, Daniel could have. What had Daniel done wrong to be dragged off at age 13? There is not a single bad thing said about Daniel anywhere in the Bible — and there aren't many people in the Bible about whom that can be said! Couldn't Daniel plead innocent? No — not before God. We all stand as sinners before God, even Daniel. Daniel identified with his people, and Daniel confessed his own sin along with theirs, saying, “we ... we ... we ... we.”

And while we are on the subject of pronouns, did you notice the variety of pronouns that Daniel uses for God? He uses the third person for God (him, he, his) and the second person (thy, thee, thine). Why the difference? Perhaps the third person is used more for praise, with the second person used more for petitions — but we can't say for sure. We do see it elsewhere. Psalm 23, for example — “*He* maketh me to lie down in green pastures: *he* leadeth me beside the still waters. *He* restoreth my soul” ... “for *thou* art with me; *thy* rod and *thy* staff they comfort me.” There the shift may be used to show the Psalmist becoming closer to God — the change in pronoun occurs right after he says “I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.”

Verses 7-10

Verses 7-10 stress the humiliation of the Hebrew people in the eyes of the surrounding heathen nations. Why was that important to Daniel? Because the Jews had a special place in God's plan.

Deuteronomy 7:6 — *For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a spe-*

cial people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

God had promised them military success as long as they remained faithful.

Deuteronomy 28:7 — *The Lord shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways.*

God had promised that they would be respected by the surrounding nations.

Deuteronomy 28:10 — *And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of thee.*

But now all of that had changed. After the death of King Josiah in 609 BC, the Jews had become objects of scorn, had been deprived of their freedom, and were being ridiculed for their belief in the one true God. This was more evidence of how far they had fallen because of their disobedience to God, and, as we will see, Daniel's real concern is that the ridicule of God's people had become ridicule of God.