

DANIEL'S GREAT PRAYER: SEEKING GOD FOR MERCY AND FORGIVENESS

DANIEL 09:01–19

Introduction

Prophecy is a fascinating subject. Most people would like to know what is in store for them in the future. What lies ahead for them? What is their destiny? Is there *some* way to change their lives? People spend fortunes annually seeking the help or opinion of the “experts,” that is, the astrologers, mediums, fortune-tellers, palm-readers, psychics and others who claim to be able to look into the future to predict or change people’s destiny.

But the reality of the situation is something entirely different. There is only one Being who can truthfully and honestly see into the future: God Himself. And God reveals what *He chooses* to reveal — the prophecy — through His divinely appointed prophet. It is the prophet, then, who reveals to man what God has shown him. This is the case in the present Scripture. God gives the reader a phenomenal look into the future through His prophet Daniel. In fact, God gave Daniel a picture of Israel’s future and actually revealed to him His own calendar or time frame for certain key events.

This passage opens with Daniel deeply concerned about the future of his dear people and their painful suffering under Babylonian rule. For over seventy years the Jews had been exiled in Babylon. Throughout the years Daniel had seen his people broken, discouraged, suffering and at times overcome by a spirit of hopelessness. Now, as an aged man, he did the only thing he could do to help them: he turned to the LORD. He sought answers concerning his people and begged God for comfort through the Scriptures and prayer. This is, *Daniel’s Vision of the Seventy Weeks (Part 1, Daniel’s Prayer): A Picture of Seeking God in Prayer and Bible Study*, Daniel 9:1-19.

- I. Daniel’s great hope for his people and nation: seeking answers from God (vv. 1-3).
- II. Daniel’s great prayer: seeking God for mercy and forgiveness (vv. 4-19).

I. *Daniel 09: 01— 03 Daniel’s Great Hope for His People and Nation: Seeking Answers from God*

Daniel was filled with great hope for his people and nation. This hope involved one of the most phenomenal experiences of Daniel’s life, and it took place during the reign of Darius, the new Persian ruler of Babylon (539-538 B.C.). Note the Scripture and outline:

Daniel was studying the Scriptures in the first year of Darius’s reign, reading Jeremiah 25:1-14, which explains why the Jews had been exiled to Babylon. Suddenly, Daniel’s attention focused upon Jeremiah 25:11-13, which says the following:

Jer 25:11-13 *This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. "But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the LORD, "and will make it desolate forever. I will bring on that land all the things I have spoken against it, all that are written in this book and prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations.*

These verses are very specific in their prediction: the Jews were to be held in captivity by Babylon for seventy years. After the seventy years, Babylon was to fall as a nation. Considering Daniel's understanding of Scripture, it is fair to assume that he was aware of Isaiah's prophecies concerning King Cyrus. Isaiah had predicted the *very name of the Persian king* who would conquer Babylon and set God's people free:

Isa 44:21, 28 *"Remember these things, Jacob, for you, Israel, are my servant. I have made you, you are my servant; Israel, I will not forget you....who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."'"*

Sometime earlier, when Daniel first heard about the young Cyrus taking the throne of Persia and uniting the Medo-Persian Empires, his heart was bound to be stirred with hope. The LORD had already shown him that the Medo-Persian Empire would conquer Babylon. This fact was made perfectly clear in Nebuchadnezzar's dream about the huge statue, when the head of gold (Babylon) was to be replaced by the chest and arms of silver, which represented Medo-Persia (2:37-39a). Furthermore, the prophet had additional evidence in the vision that God had given to him personally, the vision in which the bear (Medo-Persia) destroyed the lion that represented Babylon (7:4-5).

Now that King Cyrus of Persia had conquered Babylon, the only question left to be answered concerned the *seventy years*. From what event was the seventy — year exile to be measured? Three facts in Scripture point strongly to the year 605 B.C. as the beginning of the exile.

=> Jeremiah gave his prediction of the seventy-year captivity in 605 B.C. (see outline and note, Jer 25:1-14, esp. pt. 1).

=> The first Babylonian invasion of Judah and the first exile of the Jews took place in 605 B.C.

=> Daniel himself, as a young boy of 15-16 years old, was included in this first exile by Babylon.

In God's sovereign power to work all things out for good, He obviously arranged these events so Daniel would understand Jeremiah's prophecy and know that the Jews were soon to be set free from their captivity. The LORD would use Daniel's understanding of the Scripture to encourage His dear people who had been held captive for so long. Their day of liberation was right over the horizon. To prepare the people, God was driving

home the truth of His Holy Word to the heart of His dear prophet Daniel. Daniel knew the great promise of Isaiah:

Isa 45:1, 13 “This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him...I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty.”

These were the wonderful promises that Daniel could claim. He could lay hold of the LORD on behalf of the Jews, God's very own people. As Daniel says, he began to plead with the LORD through prayer and fasting. What he prayed is thoroughly covered in the next point.

Thought 1. What a lesson for us on prayer and Bible study! The Bible is, beyond all question, God's Holy Word. Therefore, believers should be exceedingly diligent in studying Scripture, carefully examining the prophecies that offer us so much hope and encouragement. Imagine how *alive* believers would be if they spent quality time in God's Word each day. Imagine how *motivated* they would be to share the plan of salvation if they counted the cost of not doing so. This was Daniel's heart! Listen to what God says about His Holy Word:

John 15:3 “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”

John 17:17 “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”

2 Tim 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

2 Tim 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

2 Pet 1:19-21 And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Psa 19:8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

Psa 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.

Psa 119:47 For I delight in your command because I love them.

Psa 119:97 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

Psa 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Psa. 119:130 The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.

Psa 119:140 Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them.

Prov 6:23 For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life.

Jer 15:16 When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty.

Jer. 23:29 "Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"

II. Daniel 09:04–19 Daniel's Great Prayer: Seeking God for Mercy and Forgiveness

Daniel was stirred to seek the face of the LORD, laying claim to the wonderful promises of God. Mercy, forgiveness and restoration of the nation — these were the marvellous promises God had given to Israel. And these were the promises that were the focus of Daniel's fervent, heart-moving prayer. In the Hebrew the word *prayed* is emphatic, which stresses a deep, intense fervency. Daniel must pray; he could do nothing else but pray. His soul was reaching out to the LORD, pleading for God to fulfil His Word to His dear people. Five major points can be gleaned from this wonderful prayer of Daniel.

1. First, Daniel expressed adoration for the LORD (v. 4). The word "LORD" is the Hebrew word *Yahweh* (Jehovah), the very special name for God that Israel used. God Himself gave the name of *Yahweh* or *LORD* to His people to use in addressing Him. *Lord* or *Yahweh* was the covenant name of God, the name that stressed the fact that the LORD would keep the covenant and promises He had given to His people. He was the God of the covenant, the God of redemption and deliverance (see notes, Exo 6:1-9). In expressing adoration for the LORD, Daniel praised God for the fact that He is *awesome*, meaning that God is to be feared, revered, held in awe because of His incomprehensible greatness. In particular, He is awesome because He keeps His covenant of love and mercy with His people, those who love the LORD and obey His commandments. It is genuine believers who receive the promises of God.
2. Second, Daniel confessed his sins and the sins of the Jewish people (vv. 5-8). He spelled out five sins in particular:
 - a. He confessed their wickedness and rebellion (v. 5b). Their very lifestyle was wicked and their hearts were rebellious.
 - b. He confessed their rejection of God's Holy Word (v. 5c). They were guilty of turning away from God's commandments and law.

- c. He confessed their failure to listen to the prophets, those who had faithfully proclaimed God's message. Down through the centuries the LORD's prophets had warned both the leadership and the citizens of God's coming judgment if they continued to disobey His holy commandments.
- d. He confessed their unfaithfulness to the LORD. They had refused to obey God's Holy Word and to live righteously as a witness before the surrounding nations (v. 7). In comparison to the righteousness of God, the people were covered with utter shame, for they were totally depraved. Their righteousness was as nothing but *filthy rags* in the sight of God (Isa 64:6). It had been their unfaithfulness to the LORD, their terrible evil, that had covered them with shame and led to their exile.
- e. He confessed their sin of being obstinate and hard-hearted against the LORD (v. 8). As a result of their stubborn hearts, they had brought shame upon themselves.

3. Third, Daniel acknowledged their ingratitude, the fact that they had...

- spurned God's mercy
- rebelled against God
- disobeyed God
- broken God's laws and commandments (vv. 9-10)

Daniel further acknowledged that, despite his people's ingratitude, the LORD was merciful and forgiving. He would have mercy and forgive their sins if the people would turn to Him and repent of their sins.

4. Fourth, Daniel acknowledged and honoured God's justice. God's Holy Word had forewarned them of His coming judgment (vv. 11-14). The people were presently suffering the curses of judgment because of their sins against the LORD. The sufferings of the nation in captivity were due to their sins. When they spurned God's mercy and continued to sin, God fulfilled His Word by bringing disaster upon them. His hand of judgment fell upon them for two reasons:

=> They had not repented by turning from their sins and obeying the truth.

=> The LORD is righteous and must execute justice upon all who disobey Him (v. 14).

If the law is broken, justice must be executed. The penalty for violating God's commandments must be paid. This fact Daniel acknowledged, honouring God's justice and the execution of His judgment upon the nation of Israel.

5. Fifth, Daniel asked the LORD for mercy, forgiveness and restoration (vv. 15-19). God had formerly poured out all three of these wonderful promises upon the Jews when they were held captive by Egypt. He delivered them out of their bondage. Now Daniel pleaded for the LORD to once again *free* His people, liberating them from their bondage in Babylon. Daniel made five strong requests, and these pleas are the major thrust of His prayer.

a. Daniel pleaded with God to turn His anger and wrath away from Jerusalem (v. 16). Jerusalem was the LORD's city, His holy mountain, the very city and mountain He

had chosen to bear His Name. Note that Daniel gave two reasons why God should consider turning His anger and wrath away:

- => because showing mercy was the very nature of God's righteousness, His justice
 - => because justice had now been served, for the people had already suffered for their sins. Their homeland had been destroyed and they had lost everything. Moreover, they were exiles in a foreign nation, which meant they were objects of scorn among other nationalities.
- b. Daniel pleaded with God to hear his prayer and to look with favour on the destroyed sanctuary (v. 17). He begged God to restore His people to the promised land and to help them rebuild the temple. Note that he was not making this request for the sake of the people, but for the sake of the LORD Himself.
 - c. Daniel pleaded with God to open His eyes and to look upon the desolation of the city that bore His Name (v. 18a). Ever since the days of the great King David, the LORD had chosen Jerusalem to be His holy city, the city where His holy presence would be symbolized. Thus, the prophet was asking God not to forget Jerusalem.
 - d. Daniel pleaded with God to know that his requests were not based on the people's righteousness but on God's mercy (v. 18b). Daniel knew the people were not righteous. But God was merciful. Therefore, the prophet begged God to answer his prayer because He was merciful.
 - e. Daniel pleaded with God to forgive him and the people, and to act — act immediately! (v. 19). Note the passion flooding Daniel's heart: "O LORD, Hear! O LORD, forgive! O LORD, listen and act!" It was as though his heart were about to burst. He was asking, seeking, knocking, begging, pleading, crying for God to hear and answer his request. Again, he wanted the LORD to answer — answer quickly. The LORD's own honour and reputation were at stake. Every day that the Holy City lay in ruins and the true believers among the Jews were held in bondage was another day that brought more shame to the Name of God. The Holy City and true believers bore His Name, bearing strong testimony that He is the only living and true God, the only Saviour of the world. For the sake of God's own reputation, Daniel pleaded for the LORD to hear his prayer.

Thought 1. We should be just as steadfast in prayer as we are in Bible study. We should seek God's holy face through praise and thanksgiving, pleading with Him for the desperate needs of our families, our nation and the world. Listen to what God says about prayer, seeking His holy face.

Mat 7:7-8 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

Mat 26:41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

Luke 18:1 *Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.*

John 14:13-14 *“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”*

John 15:7 *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”*

John 16:24 *“Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”*

Eph 6:18 *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

Phil 4:6-7 *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Col 4:2-3 *Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.*

James 5:13-14 *Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.*

Deut 4:29 *But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all our heart and with all our soul.*

1 Chr 16:11 *Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.*

Psa 91:15 *He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him.*

Isa 41:17 *“The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the LORD will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.”*

Thought 2. God will have mercy upon us and forgive our sins. But there is one condition: like Daniel, our hearts must be genuine...genuine enough to truly repent of our sins. Repentance means turning away from sin and turning back to the LORD. No matter how terrible the sin, if a person truly repents and trusts the LORD to forgive His sins, God will have mercy and forgive.

Luke 15:7 *“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”*

Acts 3:19 *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

2 Cor 7:10 *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*

1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

2 Chr 7:14 *If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

Psa 34:18 *The LORD is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

Psa 51:17 *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

Prov 28:13 *He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.*

Isa 55:7 *Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*

Jer 3:22 *“Return, faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding.” “Yes, we will come to you, for you are the LORD our God.”*

Ezek 18:21 *“But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die.*

Joel 2:13 *Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.*

Micah 7:18 *Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. ■*