



Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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## Chapter 9: The Prayer of Daniel

### 9:1-2, The Reason for this Prayer

...Perceived in the books: Daniel now understood something from reading the words of God's prophets. Prophecy is meant to be understood, perhaps not in every detail, especially on the first or second reading of it. Or the main points may be clear, but it is in studying not just the individual prophecy, but the **books** (plural) that we understand more and more as we let "scripture interpret scripture".

We already know from earlier chapters that Daniel was faithful in prayer, and here it is confirmed that he was also faithful in study of the Hebrew scriptures. In his position within the government, he may have had access to scrolls that a Hebrew of lesser stature would have in Babylon.

I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years: In this case, Daniel's understanding of the prophecy was relatively easy to come to, as Jeremiah 25 and 29 are chapters with explicit references to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, and 70 years (e.g. Jeremiah 25:11-13, Jeremiah 29:10).

Daniel was undoubtedly also familiar with Isaiah's prophecies concerning Cyrus, the king of Persia (Isaiah 44:28-45:4). He must've been *encouraged* to see a man named Cyrus rise to power in Persia, understanding that he was seeing the fulfillment of prophecy in his own time.

So, as John Calvin once said, “Nothing, therefore, can be better for us, than to ask for what God has already promised.”

So, 70 years from when, exactly? How to determine the beginning of the 70 years? Biblical and historical records offer at least three touchpoints in timeline of the Babylonian captivity:

- Jerusalem was attacked, and Daniel and the other captives were taken to Babylon (ca. 605 BC)
- Jerusalem was attacked and treasure was taken from the temple (ca. 597 BC)
- Jerusalem falls and the nation was exiled (ca. 587 BC)

Given just those three possibilities, there are approximately 18 years between possible start points to the 70 years. Daniel, naturally, wants the 70 years to come to an end as soon as possible. He wanted God’s mercy to come to him and all of Israel 18 years sooner rather than 18 years later!

In the first year of Darius: This would be three or four years before 70 years had passed since the attack in 605 BC. This was not too soon for Daniel to begin praying. Daniel had the foresight to look ahead three or four years and to begin praying.

Daniel is not identified as a man particularly “qualified” (by his ancestral tribe) for the ministry of intercessory prayer. He did not come from a priestly family like Ezekiel; he wasn’t a “career prophet” like Isaiah or Jeremiah. But just like all of us, he could pray, and he did.

### **9:33, Daniel’s Preparation for Prayer**

Then I turned my face to the Lord God: This speaks to Daniel’s determination to pray, not a direction on the compass. Daniel did this because he knew that his prayer was in the will of God, and that it was motivated by his love for his people, Israel.

...Seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes:

Daniel wasn’t passive as God’s prophetic plan was unfolding before him. Yet his approach was with a humble heart. Fasting, sackcloth, and ashes are all emblems of humiliation and mourning.

### **9:4-15, Daniel Confesses the Sin of His People**

“O Lord, the great and awesome God...”: Daniel began his prayer by recognizing the greatness and goodness of God. Daniel knew the problem was not with God; God always keeps His covenant, and has mercy on those who are faithful to Him.

...We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules: This says a lot about Daniel's own heart. As he confessed Israel's sin he prayed as if he were as bad as the rest of Israel, even though we've seen throughout this book that he was likely among the most faithful of all of them. Yet he confesses as **we**, not **they**.

It would have been easy for Daniel to complain to God about Israel's problems. But Daniel doesn't appear to think even for a moment that God was too hard on Israel; he recognized that God was completely righteous, faithful to His promises and prophecies, and any failure fell squarely on Israel. No, this is an honest confession, not a complaint.

We have not listened to your servants the prophets...: Daniel makes not even the slightest excuse for Israel's sin. They had everything they needed in God's words to His people, and they failed to listen. They failed to believe.

...Who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand: As Daniel prayed, he remembered that God delivered Israel from Egypt. He remembers the most prominent evidence of God's power and desire for His people, the exodus from Egypt. For us the same is found in the resurrection of Jesus (Ephesians 1:19-20).

### **9:16-19, Daniel Prays for Forgiveness and Restoration**

Let Your anger and Your wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem: After his confession of Israel's sin and God's great righteousness, Daniel simply asked God to mercifully turn His kind attention to Jerusalem and the temple ("cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary"). He also asked that God would do this without delay.

Daniel asked for all this "according to all Your righteousness". It was as if Daniel prayed, "LORD, I'm not asking You to do anything against Your righteousness. I'm praying this to advance Your righteous glory."

This teaches us that it isn't wrong to pray for our own needs. And Jesus reinforced this, as He taught us to ask, "give us this day our daily bread". At the same time, we should glorify God and ask for the glory of God to be amplified through us, and the will of God accomplished through us, recognizing that we are sometimes selfish in our requests. It's *never* a bad idea to pray – and to remind ourselves when we do – "Thy will be done." Even though at times those are the hardest four words to pray!

Daniel was not great because he prayed. Daniel prayed because he believed **God** is great and merciful and righteous.

## 9:20-23 Daniel's Prayer is Interrupted by Gabriel

While I was speaking in prayer: Jesus told his disciples “Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:8). Whenever there seems to be a delay in answer to prayer, there is reason for the delay. When it is the right time, God will answer prayer. And sometimes, God answers prayer *even before we pray*.

Isaiah talked about this:

*Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear  
(Isaiah 65:24)*

...Came to me in swift flight: This is one of the few places in the Bible where we are told that angels fly. Gabriel came quickly because there is no great distance between heaven and earth.

...The time of the evening sacrifice: This was the time of day when Moses offered the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:6) and also when Jesus was crucified (Matthew 27:45)! As a young man in Jerusalem, Daniel would have seen for himself smoke rising from the temple at the time of the evening sacrifice.

...I have now come out to give you insight and understanding: Note that Daniel didn't *ask* for insight and understanding! But it is what he needed at this time. Daniel had studied the passages in Jeremiah, but still didn't understand all that he needed. Just as Martin Luther once insisted that he learned more from fervent prayer than from hours spent studying books.

## 9:24-27, The Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks

“Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city...”: Immediately we see that the actual units of time we read in scripture are not necessarily always to be taken literally. In Biblical Hebrew, “weeks” can simply mean “groups of seven”. Usually, of course, that's a group of seven days. But it can mean other things, too. For example, in Leviticus 25:8 we see one use of this principle spelled out in the calculation of the Jubilee year:

*You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years.*

Among Bible scholars and commentators you'll find various interpretations, most believing that this “seventy weeks” refers to seventy sets of seven years, or “weeks” of years. They then go rummaging around ancient history looking for things that are 490

years apart. Let's lay that aside for now and focus on what the seventy weeks are about.

For your people and for your holy city: Gabriel tells Daniel and us what's important: the seventy weeks were focused upon Daniel's people (Israel) and his beloved holy city, Jerusalem. This is a message of comfort, of gospel, in a sense.

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.: Wow! Not only "finish the transgression" that has come to overwhelm Jerusalem, but to "put an end to sin"!

Some interpret this passage as establishing an entirely new order on earth, with an end to man's rebellion against God. But letting scripture interpret scripture, can find the fulfilment of this in Jesus's statement from the cross, "It is finished." All of the things stated here were accomplished through Jesus' death and resurrection. He "brings everlasting righteousness" with the establishment of His Kingdom, starting with His church on Earth. He "seals both vision and prophet", meaning that once He has come, there is no need for further prophets. He "anoints a most holy place" in the new, spiritual Temple spoken of by Ezekiel, namely the establishment of His church of the New Covenant on earth, and its ultimate consummation in heaven, at the end of time. Remember Jesus' words to His disciples, "What you bind on Earth shall be bound in Heaven..." and Peter's reminder that believers are "a royal priesthood." These are marks of God's dwelling place!

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.: First an event will happen when an anointed prince will restore the temple in Jerusalem. We can see in the Bible and in secular history that the Persian ruler Cyrus made a decree giving Ezra and the Babylonian captives the right to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4 and 5:13-17). In Ezra 6:6-12 we see Darius issuing a decree declaring Ezra's permission to rebuild the temple when opposition arose. And in Nehemiah 2:1-8, Artaxerxes makes a decree giving Nehemiah permission, safe passage and supplies to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and its walls. These things happened over decades, not just one week of years, though some commentators strive to find historians who propose "matching" years and timelines. And which date do we start from? Cyrus' decree? Artaxerxes'? The date the Temple was completed (which we don't know with certainty)?

Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.: Relatively speaking this is the longest portion of the seventy-week total. And a lot happened in history during this time.

It just so happens that about 483 years after Cyrus' decree Jesus was born. Many commentators therefore declare that the end of this 69-week period (the "seven weeks" plus "sixty-two weeks") **must be** at His birth, **or** at His baptism, **or** at His triumphal entry, **or** at His death, **or** at His resurrection, etc.

After the sixty-two weeks the anointed one shall be cut off: Gabriel is telling Daniel that the Messiah will be cut off for the sake of others, not for Himself. "Cut off" is also a poignant description of Jesus' earthly life up to and including the cross.

And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary: Most all Bible scholars and commentators agree that this prophecy was fulfilled in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the **man-made** temple ("the sanctuary") in AD 68-70.

Ever since then the church has lived in troubling times and has been subject to false prophets and messiahs ("Desolations are decreed.")

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.:

This "prince" who brings desolation with cunning and power attempts to end everything that God has given to man. But his/her/their end is fixed in time; God has decreed it, and promises us victory.

Daniel does not tell us how he feels about this revelation and its interpretation by Gabriel. There's some bad news, but also a lot of good news in this message.

Commentator Paul E. Kretzmann:

*The prophecy thus sets forth the vicissitudes of the Church of God, which would be relieved by the coming of the promised Messiah. But even after His coming the congregation of saints would be in fact a Church Militant, the great Roman Antichrist making the first attack upon the Lord's forces and being supported in the last days of the world by other antichristian elements following his leadership, until the Lord will definitely and finally bring destruction upon him and them at the time of the Great Judgment.*

Commentaries typical of the pre-millennial and amillennial (Lutheran) perspectives:

**Amillennial/Lutheran** - Kretzmann's Popular Commentary of the Bible, Daniel 9:

<https://studylight.org/commentaries/eng/kpc/daniel-9.html>

**Pre-Millennial/Protestant:** Liberty University's "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel":

[https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1108&context=pretrib\\_arch](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1108&context=pretrib_arch)

From the conclusion of the LU paper, emphasis mine:

#### CONCLUSION

*I think that sound biblical exegesis of Daniel 9:24-27 must lead to an understanding that the seventieth week is separated from the first sixty-nine weeks of years because of Israel (sic) failure to accept Jesus as their promised Messiah. Therefore, God has postponed the final week of years until the start of the seven-year tribulation. In the meantime, the New Testament teaches us that the church age will intervene during the postponement of Israel's final week of years....*

What is described in this paragraph is not so much **exegesis** (extracting the interpretation from the text), but **eisegesis** (inserting interpretation into the text). Notice how the underlined words imply that the timeline is driven not by God, but by human decision, namely the faith of Israel. This might explain why many denominations in modern protestant Christianity are very concerned with the state of the nation of Israel as a geopolitical unit, not as the body of believers as Paul describes in Romans 9:3-8:

*For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.*

*But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.*