

DANIEL INTERCEDES

As chapter 9 begins, Jerusalem was in ruins and the prophet was diligently studying the seventy year prophecy of Jeremiah 25:9-13. There was a specific reason why Daniel was studying this particular prophecy. Through Jeremiah, God had promised that the captivity of Israel would last only seventy years.

But eleven years earlier, God had seemed to indicate that the sanctuary and the people would be trampled underfoot for 2300 years (Daniel 8:14). This apparent discrepancy perplexed Daniel. He could not comprehend how the prophecy of Jeremiah 25 could be reconciled with the one in Daniel 8:14.

Daniel then uttered one of the most deeply spiritual prayers in the Bible. He first confessed his sin and that of his people (verses 4-11a). Next he described the results of his sin and that of his people (verses 11b-14), and finally he interceded before God, asking Him to restore Israel to its land (verses 15-19). The urgency of Daniel's prayer was directly related to the vision he had received eleven years earlier (Daniel 8). He seemed to surmise that perhaps God now intended to prolong the seventy years to 2300 because of the covenant unfaithfulness of Israel. Obviously, Daniel did not want the seventy years to be extended to 2300, so he poured out his heart to God, pleading for forgiveness.

In response to Daniel's plea, God sent Gabriel to inform him that his prayer had been accepted and that an explanation would be given (9:20-23). The desolation of Jerusalem in Daniel 9:2 motivated Daniel's prayer and the promise of Jerusalem's restoration and rebuilding was the answer to his prayer.

In verses 24-27 Gabriel explained that the city of Jerusalem and its people would be given another opportunity. The city, temple and walls would be rebuilt according to the schedule of Jeremiah's prophecy. Seventy weeks (490 years) would be given Israel to redeem her past failures. At the very end of this period, God would even send Messiah the Prince who would make a final urgent appeal to Israel. But this appeal would fall upon deaf ears and as a result the theocracy would come to an end, Jerusalem would be destroyed, the temple demolished and the people scattered among the nations.

What promise gave Daniel the confidence to pray for his people? Jer. 29:10-14.

"God did not forget his people, even though they were captive in Babylon. He planned to give them a new beginning with a new purpose—to turn them into new people. In times of deep trouble it may appear as though God has forgotten you. But God may be preparing you, as he did the people of Judah, for a new beginning with him at the centre.

"According to God's wise plan, his people were to have hope and a future; consequently they could call upon him in confidence. Although the exiles were in a difficult place and time, they should not despair because they had God's presence, the privilege of prayer, and God's grace. God can be sought and found when we seek him wholeheartedly. Neither strange lands, sorrows, frustration, nor physical problems can break that communion."—Life Application Study Bible, p. 1339.

As you read Daniel's prayer, summarize the sins that led to captivity. Dan. 9:5-14.

What special sin was Israel guilty of committing? Dan. 9:6.

Israel's history shows that it is dangerous to despise God's prophets. Are we guilty of this sin today? God has entrusted us with expressions of His love by revealing to us wonderful truths through the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White. Have we undermined these messages by disputing how they were given rather than what they say? Or have we simply not bothered to read them? Or do we reject them because they condemn sin in our lives?

What verses in Daniel's prayer show that he trusted in the mercy of a gracious God?

Part of Daniel 9:13 often translated "and understand thy truth" could also be translated "and prosper in thy truth." Why has God revealed truth to us? How can we prosper in that truth? Have we, either as a church, or even as individuals, prospered in God's truth as much as we could?

Before continuing here, make sure you understand the charts we've looked at the past few weeks. They form an immovable foundation for where we are going next. The crucial point that should be understood now is that the judgment scene in Daniel 7 and the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8 are the same event and that this event takes place sometime after the 1,260-year period that depicted a phase of papal persecution of the saints.

Meanwhile, considering the time frame for this event, the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, what's the only possible sanctuary that's being cleansed here, the one on earth or the one in heaven (see Matt. 24:2; Luke 21:6; Heb. 8:1, 2)? The answer is obvious.

Finally, look at what the Lord has used to frame the important teaching of the cleansing of the sanctuary—and that's massive world empires, things as immovable, unchangeable, and verifiable as are possible in this world. The Lord isn't asking us to base our faith on sketchy, shadowy things; instead, He's framing these great truths around world history, as firm a foundation as possible. God, obviously, wants us to believe these truths; that's why He makes it easy for us to do just that.

Daniel's study and prayer had cheered him with the news that Israel's captivity in Babylon would soon end and God's people would be returning to Jerusalem. Daniel knew the captivity would last for 70 years (Jer. 29:10). It began during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (605 B.C., Dan. 1:1), and now after the vision of Daniel 8, it is already the reign of Darius (c. 539 B.C.). With almost 66 years gone, the captivity indeed would be over soon. Yet, at the conclusion of Daniel 8, the angel shocked Daniel with the news that the sanctuary will lay trampled for 2,300 years.

What should the prophet make of this? The only thing he could do was pray. This week's lesson deals with the essentials of that prayer (Dan. 9:3-9): its foundation, its appeal to God, and our relationship to Him and His response to us.

Prayer: It's Foundation

The Bible teaches that prayer is our response to God's Word. "Ask," He has said. So, we respond to His bidding—the foundation of our prayers. Thus, to a Christian, prayer is the second word, for the first word is always God's. In Daniel's case, what was God's first word? Was God's Word contradictory? Why should it take 2,300 years for the restoration of the sanctuary when Jeremiah had clearly foretold that Babylonian captivity should end in 70 years (Jer. 29:10)? Daniel "perceived" this in "the books . . . according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet" (Dan. 9:2). How did Daniel respond to God's bidding? He sought clarity and understanding for the vision through prayer.

Prayer: The Appeal to God

Repeatedly Daniel used the phrases “the Lord my God,” “O Lord,” or “Lord God,” thus leaving no doubt as to whom one should pray. Three Hebrew words for God are used here. First, Yahweh: the LORD. He is the self-existent, eternal One, who is faithful. Second, El: God. He is mighty and powerful. The key word is power, as revealed to Abraham: “ ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless’ ” (Gen. 17:1). Third, Adonai: Lord. God is the Sovereign Ruler of the universe.

Put these three words together, and we have the image of a God who is faithful, who is powerful, and who has purpose for us individually and collectively. To this “‘great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands’ ” (Dan. 9:4), Daniel turned in prayer. He is the God of righteousness (vs. 7), of mercy and forgiveness (vs. 9), and of law (vs. 10). He is the God of majesty, holiness, and infinity—and yet approachable, caring, and loving. He is the God of heaven—and of earth.

Daniel knew his God—personally, intimately, and experientially. Therefore, his prayer is direct, with no shade of fear or hint of hesitancy. Rather, it is like a friend conversing with a friend or a child asking a parent for clarification.

Prayer: Relationship and Response

Prayer is not a game of “you scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours.” God is not a pagan deity itching for our apologies or shouts of misplaced praise. Terrible in His judgment and tender and gracious in His concerns, He waits for us to come to Him with transparency, boldness, and trust. And as we come, Daniel’s prayer suggests we should do three things.

First, acknowledge our sinfulness. “‘We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled’ ” (Dan. 9:5). The word sinned suggests missing the mark. The words done wrong point to the deliberate falsehood in rearranging the moral guideposts. Acted wickedly speaks of moral failure. Rebelled is a deliberate rejection of God’s commandments. Neither did Israel listen to God’s servants (vs. 6). In 17 verses (vss. 3-19), the prophet refers 14 times to the sinfulness of Israel, thus revealing the gravity of sin, the need for confession, and the importance of repentance.

Second, acknowledge our predicament in the face of God’s holiness. Prayer is speaking to God as to a friend, but that does not make God our equal. To Him belongs “‘righteousness’ ” and to us “‘confusion of face’ ” (vss. 7, 8). The former is firmness, the latter chaos. Daniel is sure that the confused state of his people was because they rejected God’s Word, which alone assures a strong house of faith.

Third, acknowledge God’s delivering power. Daniel grasps a timeless truth in redemptive history: “‘we do not present our supplications before thee on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of thy great mercy’ ” (vs. 18).

Fourth, never give up. Hopelessness is the most dangerous foe 1 Kings 3:5-14, Daniel 9:1-23, Micah 6:8

- This week’s lesson is a reminder that, while we’re sometimes allowed to preview the great themes of the future, our primary responsibilities are in the present. Few Bible passages match this imperative for purposeful living: “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to

walk humbly with your God?" (Mic. 6:8). How are justice, kindness, and humility revealed in your personal life and in the lives of your congregation?

- In Daniel 9:2, Daniel turns his attention from prophetic timetables that stretch to the "distant future" (Dan. 8:26) to a prophecy that he and his people believed would be fulfilled in their day: the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Is prophecy always fulfilled as we expect it? What might hinder or alter the way God's prophecies are fulfilled?
- Most of Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9 features Daniel's confession of the sins of his people. Not until the last few verses does Daniel state his request: "O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act!" (Dan. 9:19). What do we miss when our prayers consist primarily of an endless list of requests? What more might God want to hear?
- While Daniel was still praying, Gabriel appeared in order to help him understand the prophecy that had left him baffled (see Daniel 8). Just as Solomon prayed for wisdom and received riches and honor (1 Kings 3:5-14), so Daniel prayed for forgiveness and received understanding to interpret the puzzle of the 2,300 days. What does this teach us about prayer?