

This May Take a While

Daniel 9:1-27, Jeremiah 9:4-14, Matthew 24:15-30

Slide 1

Have you ever been on a trip with kids? It can be very tiring, especially when they start asking, “Are we there yet?”

Even when you try and tell them that there’s still a ways to go, ten minutes later, the same question is asked again. “*Are we there yet?*”

In other words, are we at least making progress? Sometimes it doesn’t seem like we are! In the Lord’s Prayer, we pray, “*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*”

Yet we don’t see righteousness prevail. We don’t see the degree of transformation in the lives of Christians for which we hoped.

We pray for our nation, for justice, truth, and peace. We pray for our world, where so many are oppressed without hope or opportunity.

We pray for people, even those in our own family, hoping for transformation and growth, healing and restoration, but the answer doesn’t come on our timetable.

We pray for ourselves, seeking a job, healing, or the love of our life. We seek wholeness, victory over sin and evil, success and prosperity, or a breakthrough in relationships.

It takes so long, and it’s not quite as we hoped. So, what should we do when our hopes are unfulfilled?

The covenant blessings promised to Abraham, Moses, and David were on hold. The people had been taken to a strange land, far from the land God promised to Abraham.

The temple was gone, along with the sacrifices. There was no king on David's throne, and no kingdom of prosperity and social justice.

Daniel and the people of Israel had been in exile in Babylon for almost 70 years and he's getting old, but Daniel knew why. Moses had explained it in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 29:25-26, "*It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt. They went off and worshiped other gods and bowed down to them, gods they did not know, gods he had not given them.*"

Although he had a comfortable life, he was still troubled by the condition of God's people in exile and God's unfulfilled promises.

In chapter 9, Daniel expresses this concern.

Slide 2

Daniel 9:1-2, "*In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.*"

This time frame given to Jeremiah that Daniel mentions in verse two comes from Jeremiah 29:10-11.

Jeremiah 29:10-11, "*This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*"

After Daniel read this passage, he did the math. If he was taken to Babylon in 605BC, and it is now 539BC, 66 years had passed.

Even if he started counting from the final destruction of the temple in 587BC, that makes 49 years, still close enough for government work.

Jeremiah's prophecy gave Daniel hope; hope that the exile would end soon, and God's people would be restored to their home.

Daniel 9:3-4, “*So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: “Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments,”*

So, what did Daniel do, he prayed. Daniel took his concerns directly to God. Even though Jesus gave us a good example of how to pray in Matthew 6, this is a great prayer.

Daniel begins with praise to: “*the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love...*”

The Hebrew word for love used here is “*hesed*” which means a steadfast, covenant love. Then he confesses the sins of the people.

Daniel 9:5-6, “*we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.*

Though Daniel was a great man of God, but he recognized that he too was not guiltless. He gave no excuses and was specific about the sins that had been committed.

Daniel 9:7-14, “*Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame—the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, LORD, because we have sinned against you. The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him; we have not obeyed the LORD our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets. All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. “Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you. You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing on us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem. Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come on us, yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth. The LORD did not hesitate to bring the disaster on us, for the LORD our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him.”*

Repeatedly, he acknowledged that God was righteous. Daniel showed a profound understanding of God’s righteousness, for God’s righteousness does not just punish, but it saves, too.

Daniel 9:15-19, “*Now, Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong. Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us. “Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name.*

We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.”

Throughout this prayer, Daniel appealed to God’s character, verse 9: “*The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving,*” and verse 18, “*We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy.*”

Will God answer Daniel’s prayer? If He does, will He give him exactly that for which he asked?

Slide 3

Daniel 9:20-24, “*While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for his holy hill— while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, “Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the word and understand the vision: “Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place.”*

How disappointing! Not 70 years, but 70 times 7! Had God increased the punishment? Moses warned the Israelites in Leviticus 26:18, “*If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over.*”

Seven times seventy years would be 490 years!

The 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecy were fulfilled, or at least closely matched, by events in history when King Cyrus of Persia in 539 BC issued a decree to allow some Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

Yet Jeremiah's fulfillment fell short of what God wanted to do for His people. The first wave of exiles who returned to Jerusalem were lazy and undisciplined.

They failed to live as God commanded, oppressing the poor, and being casual about the law of God.

When Nehemiah and Ezra went to Jerusalem several decades later, they found the city in shambles and life in disarray. The people had ignored the law of God and become like their pagan neighbors.

At this time, Ezra took a legalistic approach to the law, forcing obedience to the external rules. Unfortunately, this legalism became the foundation for the legalism of the Pharisees in the time of Jesus.

Now, God knew that seventy years wouldn't be enough to accomplish all He wanted to do for His people. He had bigger and better plans, which would take a lot longer.

Daniel 9:24, "*Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place.*"

Slide 4

So, what's the meaning of this seventy 'sevens'? Is it 70×7 years, 490 years, or is it symbolic? Gabriel explained it clearly in the next few verses so that any angel could understand it.

Daniel 9:25-27, “*Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.*”

But we are not angels, and this is so confusing! I checked 9 commentaries and found 9 different interpretations!

Some see a fulfillment in historical events in the time of the Greek king Antiochus Epiphanes, around 167 B.C. Those events weren’t exactly 490 years later, but some of the descriptions in Daniel sound familiar.

The “*anointed one cut off*” might be the high priest, Onias. The “*covenant with many*” might be Jews who welcomed Greek rule.

The “*abomination that causes desolation*” might be the desecration of the temple by Antiochus. The “*end poured out on him*” might be Antiochus’ defeat at the hand of Judas Maccabeus.

Others don’t see the prophecy fulfilled at any point in recorded history. They see the fulfillment of the prophecy in the “*end times*,” leading up to the second coming of Christ and the end of life on earth.

Many have developed elaborate schematics, involving the rapture of Christians, a tribulation, and a thousand-year reign of Christ in Jerusalem, etc.

Jesus, who was familiar with Daniel, interpreted the prophecy symbolically.

Remember when Jesus was walking near the temple with his disciples, and He told them the temple would be destroyed with not one stone left on another. His words were fulfilled in 70 A.D., when the Romans leveled the temple.

It was a traumatic experience for Jews and Christians alike, and Jesus told His disciples that when that time came, they should get out of town. He described that event in the words of Daniel.

Matthew 24:15-18, “*When you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak.”*

Jesus then went on to say in Matthew 24:29-30, “*Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.”*

When will that happen? Not 7 years after the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.! No, it will happen when Jesus returns in glory, and the end comes. When will that be? In God’s own timing.

Jesus said there would be false messiahs and the love of many would grow cold. He talked about wars, famines, and earthquakes.

That sounds like our world, and the world of 70 A.D., and the world of Antiochus Epiphanes, and the world of Daniel.

It will always be that way—until it's not!

Slide 5

Conclusion

Daniel prayed for the greatest thing he could imagine... rebuilding Jerusalem. It was a good prayer, a righteous prayer, but God had a greater plan.

Listen again to the message God sent through Gabriel in Daniel 9:24, “*Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city:*

*to finish transgression,
to put an end to sin,
to atone for wickedness,
to bring in everlasting righteousness,
to seal up vision and prophecy and
to anoint the Most Holy Place.”*

How would the Most Holy Place be permanently anointed as a place of forgiveness and grace? Our Redeemer ascended into heaven, where He intercedes for us.

How would God’s kingdom be established in everlasting righteousness? Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father.

How will transgression and sin be ended? We will all be perfected as children of God, made like Jesus in holiness and righteousness.

Daniel had to wait for all of that just like we have to wait for the end of life on earth and the beginning of the bigger and better things God has for us.

So, what should we do while we wait? Daniel had it right: We should pray. We should begin our prayers by praising God, as “*the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love...*”

We should humbly confess our sins, and acknowledge our unworthiness, while remembering that God is righteous!

We should repent, turn from all wickedness, and give our attention to God's truth and God's law. We should depend upon God's grace to give us what we ask, and so much more.

We should ask, even plead, for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. And then, believing God, we should stand with courage and confidence greater than Daniel's.

Our final goal, the end of our journey, may take a while. It might be difficult, and we might not always see God's plan, but in the end, our prayers will be answered, bigger and better than we can imagine.