

## Lesson 22

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 Daniel praying to God.

Daniel's so-called "secret" was prayer and Bible study. Daniel remained faithful by speaking to God in prayer and listening to God in his word.

Are we looking for modern-day Daniels? If we are, then we need to 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 down on my knees. That is how Daniel himself became a Daniel!

And notice that prayer cannot be separated 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, he still found it important to read and study the written word of God. We are not prophets. How much more important a role should Bible study play in our own lives!

Daniel is doing in verse 2 here what Peter would describe many years later.

 **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 us that Daniel 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 church counsel that Jeremiah belonged in the inspired canon. Daniel knew that it did, and Daniel calls the book of Jeremiah "the word of the Lord" in verse 2.

God gave us his word; God's word did not come to us 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 answer that question.

**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" in Jeremiah 25:11 - "desolation" 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 or a figurative 70 years? As we have seen with some (but not all) of the numbers in this book, I think the answer is both. I think 70 has both a literal meaning and a symbolic meaning. And again, having both a literal and a figurative meaning should not trouble us. The number 70 did not occur by random. God chose the number, and God determined the length of the exile. In fact, Ezra 1:1 tells us that God stirred up Cyrus to allow the people to return from exile.

Let's start with the symbolic meaning, which is easy to see. The number seven denotes the perfection and the number ten denotes the completeness. So together the number 70 denotes the perfect and complete period of time during which God taught his people a lesson about their rebellion and

disobedience. And that lesson worked. Idolatry was never the same problem for God's people after the exile as it was before the exile.

What about the literal meaning of 70?

Some 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. And 70 years is sometimes used that way.

**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.

But a problem with the notion that 70 is purely figurative or that 70 just denotes 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 that about 70 years had passed since the exile occurred. In short, Daniel seems to have been watching the clock!

So, if the 70 year time period is to be understood literally as the duration of the exile, then to what period does it refer? When did the clock start? There are several theories.

**Theory #1:** The first deportation likely occurred in 605 BC. If we count out 70 years from that 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 in my opinion 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, it seems, was not planning to return himself, or at least there is no evidence that he did, but Daniel wanted his fellow exiles - most of whom had never seen their homeland - to return and rebuild the city and the temple, and Daniel wanted that to happen soon. I think Daniel wanted to see that great departure from exile with his own eyes! He had arrived as a teenager, and now in his 80's he wanted to see God's people return to their city.

Daniel must have wondered how this would ever occur. The Persians had just replaced the Chaldeans, but so far there had been no change in the Jews' situation. But Daniel knew with certainty, 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. That 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. As I said, the word "desolation" is a key word here.

I think we will find that in Daniel the word "desolation" is used in two ways - first, the word "desolation" is used to describe the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem by Rome (Daniel 9:27 and Daniel 12:11) and, second, the word "desolation" is used describe 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 so 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 Maccabeans), but it would not last. God's own people rejected God's only begotten son, and the desolation that would follow from that rejection would be final - and it came not at the hand of the Babylonians (the first kingdom) or the Greeks (the third kingdom), but at the hand of the Romans (the fourth kingdom).

God provided a way of escape for the faithful remnant, but there was only desolation for the unfaithful. 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 heartbreaking 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 statement by Christ in Matthew 23 is the message of Daniel 9 and the meaning of the prophecy that ends this difficult chapter.

When you read commentaries that spin off in a thousand different directions with a thousand different wild theories about the 70 weeks of Daniel 9, keep the word "desolation" in mind - and read Matthew 23 and 24.

Jesus himself ties Matthew 24 to specific prophecies in Daniel - and Jesus himself in Matthew 24:34 tells us that those prophecies were fulfilled in the first century, as does this chapter as we will see.

## 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:

Here is how one commentator described the great prayer that we are about to see in this chapter:

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. Sad because of our neglect of this beautiful prayer, but also sad because this prayer will help us understand the difficult verses that close this chapter.

Verse 3 tells us something very important about Daniel, and something that we should have already known about Daniel - Daniel took prayer very seriously. He was almost executed because of his praying! If we want to be like Daniel, then we should also take prayer very seriously.

And yes, the prayer in verses 4-19 is for a specific time and a specific situation, but this prayer can also teach us much about the power of prayer, and it can show us how a true servant of God should approach the God 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, he mourned (ashes), and he clothed himself with sackcloth.

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, confessional 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. Daniel's 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. James 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.

So how should we go about studying this great 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 now think that is not the best way to study this prayer. I am reminded of the adage that what we dissect, we kill!

To really see the beauty and power of this prayer, I think we need to see it all at once. We need to hear it from start to finish as Daniel prayed it and as God heard it. So before we talk about this prayer, I want to read the entire prayer in verses 4-19.

But I want you to do more than just listen while I read. 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. And think about what was happening behind the scenes, and think 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? Was it the

great Persian army? Was it 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.

So think about Daniel praying alone in his room.

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 seemingly not concerned about?

Fourth, notice Daniel's requests in his prayer. What does Daniel request? What does Daniel 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, because 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 Daniel's prayer is that there is absolutely no evasion. Daniel confesses his own personal guilt and the guilt of the entire Jewish nation. Daniel makes no excuses - the Jews deserved their punishment.

Daniel loved his people, but Daniel 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. But the people thought that they would be safe as 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 prays for his people, confessing the sin that caused God to punish them by the deportation, Daniel does not distance himself from his people. Instead, Daniel identifies 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 others, or we sometimes confess sin in a way that excuses our own sins. Daniel was not like that.

But if anyone could ever have rightly pointed a finger at others, it would have been Daniel. 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 have sinned"

And while we are on the subject of pronouns, did you notice the variety of pronouns that Daniel uses for God? He uses both 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." And perhaps we have a similar reason here; we don't know for sure.

## 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 special 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, they had lost their freedom, and they 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.

## Verses 11-14

In verses 11-14 of his prayer, Daniel praises the justice of God. Specifically, Daniel praises God for how God had dealt with his people according to all of the warnings and promises that had been given to Moses.

Should we be surprised that Daniel was praising God's justice when Daniel and his fellow exiles were suffering under that justice? It is not surprising at all if you know Daniel. As one commentator noted:

To Daniel it was more important for the God of Israel to retain his integrity and uphold his moral law than for his guilty people to escape the consequences of their infidelity. Had God not fulfilled his word of judgment, little credence could be placed in his word of grace. If a nation like Judah, instructed so perfectly in the truth of God, could fall into idolatry and immorality and defy the Lord to punish them as he had promised to do, why should anyone obey the Almighty or believe in him?

The punishment of the Jews vindicated the holiness and righteousness of God and demonstrated to the world the sanctity of God's law and word. And that was why Daniel praises and exalts the justice of God.

#daniel