

From Confession to Consolation



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 9; Jer. 25:11, 12; 29:10; 2 Kings 19:15–19; Matt. 5:16; James 5:16.*

Memory Text: “‘O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name’” (*Daniel 9:19, NKJV*).

Daniel 9 contains one of the great prayers of the Bible. In crucial moments of his life, Daniel resorts to prayer in order to cope with the challenges that lie before him. When Daniel and his colleagues are about to be killed because of the mysterious dream of a pagan king, the prophet approaches God in prayer (*Daniel 2*). And when a royal decree forbids petitions to any God but to the king, Daniel continues to offer his daily prayers toward Jerusalem (*Daniel 6*). Thus, as we consider the prayer in Daniel 9, let us remember that the vision of the 2,300 evenings and mornings in Daniel 8 greatly impacts the prophet. Although the overall contours of that prophecy are explained, Daniel cannot make sense of the time period conveyed by the dialogue between the two heavenly beings: “Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed” (*Dan. 8:14*). It is only now, in chapter 9, that more light is given to the prophet, and this time, too, it is in response to earnest prayer.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 7.

The Centrality of God's Word

Read Daniel 9:1, 2. Daniel said that he “understood by books” the prophecy he was studying so carefully. What book or books of the Bible did he mean?

As we look into this prayer, it becomes clear that it arises from an in-depth study of God's previous revelation to Moses and the prophets. Having learned from Jeremiah's scroll that his period of captivity will last 70 years (*see Jer. 25:11, 12; 29:10*), Daniel understands the importance of the historical moment in which he is living.

Let us bear in mind that Daniel offers this prayer in 539 B.C., the year that the Persian Empire replaces Babylon. So, almost 70 years have elapsed since Nebuchadnezzar has conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. Therefore, according to the prophecy of Jeremiah, God's people will soon return to their homeland. Trusting the Word of God, Daniel knows that something momentous is about to happen to his people and that, just as God promises in His Word, the exile in Babylon shall soon end and the Jews will return to their home.

From his study of the Scriptures available to him, Daniel also realizes how serious the sins of his people are. Because they have broken the covenant, they have severed their relationship with God; the inevitable consequence is, therefore, the exile (*Lev. 26:14–45*). Thus, it is the study of God's revelation that provides Daniel with an understanding of the times and that gives him a sense of urgency to plead with God on behalf of the people.

As we approach the last days of earth's history, we need more than ever to study and live according to God's Word. Only Scripture can provide us with an authoritative explanation of the world we live in. After all, Scripture tells the story of the great controversy between good and evil, and thus reveals that human history will close with the obliteration of evil and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom. The more we study the Scriptures, the better we can understand the contemporary situation of the world and our place in it, as well as our reasons for hope amid a world that offers none.

How does the Bible help us understand to some degree a world that, in and of itself, can so easily seem to make no sense at all?

An Appeal to Grace

Read Daniel 9:3–19. On what basis does Daniel make his plea for mercy?

We should especially note a few points in this prayer.

First, nowhere in Daniel’s prayer is he asking for any kind of explanation for the calamities that happened to the Jewish people. He knows the reason. Indeed, the bulk of the prayer consists of Daniel himself recounting the reason: “We have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets” (*Dan. 9:10, NKJV*). The last time we left Daniel having a need to understand something was at the end of Daniel 8, when he says he does not understand the vision of the 2,300 evenings and mornings (*see Dan. 8:27*).

The second point is that this prayer is an appeal to God’s grace, to God’s willingness to forgive His people even though they have sinned and done evil. In one sense, we see here a powerful illustration of the gospel, of sinful people who have no merit of their own, nevertheless seeking grace that they don’t deserve and for forgiveness that they haven’t earned. Is this not an example of where each one of us is, individually, before God?

Read Daniel 9:18, 19. What other reason does Daniel give for the Lord to answer his prayer?

Another aspect of Daniel’s prayer deserves mention: the appeal to the honor of God’s name. That is, the prayer is not motivated by Daniel’s personal convenience or that of his people, but for God’s own sake (*Dan. 9:17–19*). In other words, the petition must be granted because God’s name will be honored.

Read 2 Kings 19:15–19. In what ways does Hezekiah’s prayer resemble Daniel’s? What does Matthew 5:16 say about how we, too, can glorify God?

The Value of Intercession

Read Daniel 9:5–13. What is significant about the fact that Daniel keeps on saying that “we” have done wrong, thereby including himself in the sins that ultimately have brought such calamity to the nation?

Daniel’s prayer is just one among other significant intercessory prayers contained in the Bible. Such prayers touch God’s heart, staving off judgment and bringing deliverance from enemies instead. When God is ready to destroy the entire Jewish nation, the intercession of Moses stays His hand (*Exod. 32:7–14, Num. 14:10–25*). Even when severe drought is about to consume the land, God answers Elijah’s prayer and pours out rain to revive the land (*1 Kings 18*).

As we pray for family members, friends, and other people or situations, God hears our prayers and can intervene. Sometimes it may take longer for a prayer to be answered, but we can rest assured that God never forgets the needs of His children (*see James 5:16*).

In this case, Daniel plays the role of an intercessor, or mediator, between God and the people. From his study of the Scriptures, the prophet realizes how sinful the people have become as they transgress God’s law and refuse to hear God’s warnings. Thus, recognizing their desperate spiritual condition, Daniel prays for healing and forgiveness. But the prophet also identifies with his people. In some aspects Daniel illustrates the role of Christ as our intercessor (*John 17*). However, there is a radical difference: Christ is “without sin” (*Heb. 4:15*) and therefore has no need to confess personal sin or to offer sacrifices for personal forgiveness (*Heb. 7:26, 27*). But He identifies Himself in a unique way with sinners: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (*2 Cor. 5:21, NIV*).

“If you would gather together everything that is good and holy and noble and lovely in man and then present the subject to the angels of God as acting a part in the salvation of the human soul or in merit, the proposition would be rejected as treason.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 24. What do these words teach us about our need for an Intercessor on our behalf?

The Work of the Messiah

The intercessory prayer of Daniel addresses two main concerns: the sins of the people and the desolation of Jerusalem. Thus, God's response deals with these two petitions. Through the work of the Messiah the people will be redeemed and the sanctuary will be anointed. The two specific petitions, however, are answered in ways that transcend the immediate historical horizon of Daniel: the work of the Messiah will benefit the entire human race.

Read Daniel 9:21–27. What work was to be done within the 70-week period? Why can only Jesus accomplish it?

1. “To finish the transgression.” The Hebrew word for “transgression” (*pesha'*) suggests the willful violations by an inferior against a superior (for example, *Prov. 28:24*). This word also occurs in the Bible with regard to open defiance of God by humans (*Ezek. 2:3*). Through the blood of Jesus, however, rebellion against God is quashed, and humans are offered the merits that flow from Calvary.

2. “To make an end of sins.” The verb carries the meaning of “to seal,” and here it means that sin is forgiven. Since the Fall, the human race has been unable to live up to God's standards, but the Messiah will take care of our failures.

3. “To make reconciliation for iniquity.” As Paul says: “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (*Col. 1:19, 20, NKJV*). Here, too, only Jesus can bring about this reality.

4. “To bring in everlasting righteousness.” Christ took our place on the cross and thereby bestowed upon us the blessed condition of “being right” with God. Only by faith can we receive this righteousness that comes from God.

5. “To seal up vision and prophecy.” When Christ offered Himself in sacrifice, the Old Testament prophecies that pointed to His atoning work were sealed up in the sense that they were fulfilled.

6. “And to anoint the Most Holy.” The Most Holy mentioned here is not a person but a place. So, the statement refers to the anointing of the heavenly sanctuary as Christ was inaugurated there as our great High Priest (*Heb. 8:1*).

The Prophetic Calendar

At the end of the vision of the 2,300 evenings and mornings, the prophet is astonished because he cannot understand it (*Dan. 8:27, NKJV*). Ten years later, Gabriel comes to help Daniel “understand” the vision (*Dan. 9:23*). This latter revelation supplies the missing information and reveals that the work of the Messiah is to be accomplished toward the end of a period of 70 weeks. According to the year-day principle and the course of the events predicted, the 70 weeks must be understood as 490 years. And the starting point for this period is the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (*Dan. 9:25*). This command is issued by King Artaxerxes in 457 B.C. It allows the Jews under the leadership of Ezra to rebuild Jerusalem (*Ezra 7*). According to the biblical text, the 70 weeks are “determined,” or “cut off.” This indicates that the time period of 490 years has been cut from a larger time period, that is, from the 2,300 years designated in the vision of chapter 8. It follows from this that the 2,300 years and the 490 years must have the same starting point, namely, 457 B.C.

The prophecy of the 70 weeks is divided into three sections: seven weeks, 62 weeks, and the seventieth week.

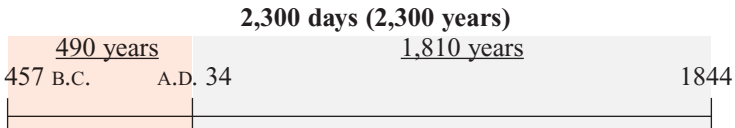
The seven weeks (49 years) most likely refer to the time during which Jerusalem will be rebuilt. After these seven weeks, there will be 62 weeks (434 years) leading to “Messiah the Prince” (*Dan. 9:25*). Thus 483 years after Artaxerxes’s decree, that is, in the year A.D. 27, Jesus the Messiah is baptized and anointed by the Holy Spirit for His Messianic mission.

During the seventieth week, other crucial events will take place: (1) “Messiah shall be cut off” (*Dan. 9:26, NKJV*), which refers to the death of Christ. (2) The Messiah “shall confirm a covenant with many for one week” (*Dan. 9:27, NKJV*). This is the special mission of Jesus and the apostles to the Jewish nation. It is undertaken during the last “week,” from A.D. 27 to 34. (3) “But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering” (*Dan. 9:27, NKJV*). Three and a half years after His baptism (that is, in the middle of the week), Jesus brings the sacrificial system to an end—in the sense that it no longer has any more prophetic significance—by offering Himself as the final and perfect sacrifice of the New Covenant, thus voiding the need for any more animal sacrifices. The last week of the 70-week prophecy ends in A.D. 34, when Stephen is martyred and the gospel message begins to reach not only the Jews but the Gentiles, as well.

Read Daniel 9:24–27. Even amid the great hope and promise of the Messiah, we read about violence, war, and desolation. How can this help assure us that amid the calamities of life, hope still exists?

Further Thought: Below is the chart explaining how the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27 ties in with and forms the starting point of the 2,300-year prophecy of Daniel 8:14. If you count 2,300 years from 457 B.C. (remembering to delete the nonexistent zero year), you get 1844; or, if you count the remaining 1,810 years from A.D. 34 (2,300 minus the first 490 years), you come to 1844, as well. Thus, the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14 can be shown to start in 1844.

Notice, too, how the 1844 date fits with what we saw in Daniel 7 and 8. That is, the judgment in Daniel 7, which is the same thing as the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8 (see the last two weeks’ lessons), occurs *after* the 1,260 years of persecution (*Dan. 7:25*) and yet *before* the second coming of Jesus and the establishment of His eternal kingdom.



Discussion Questions:

- 1 Scholars have said, and rightly so, that the 2,300-day prophecy and the 70-week prophecy are really just one prophecy. Why would they say that? What evidence can you find to back up that assertion?
- 2 What can we learn from Daniel’s intercessory prayer that can help us in our own intercessory prayer life?
- 3 Christ’s sacrifice in our behalf is our only hope. How should this help keep us humble and, even more important, make us more loving and forgiving of others? What should Luke 7:40–47 say to all of us?
- 4 Look at how central Scripture is to Daniel’s prayer and his hope. After all, the nation has been savagely defeated, the people exiled, their land ravaged, and their capital destroyed. And yet, he has the hope that despite all this, the people will go back home. Where could he have gotten this hope other than from the Bible and God’s promises written in it? What should this tell us about the hope we can have, as well, from the promises in the Word?