

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" (*pasha*) 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.

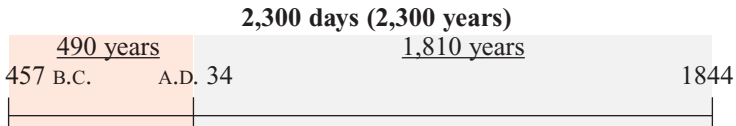
The seven weeks (49 years) most likely refer to the time during which Jerusalem will be rebuilt. After these seven weeks, there will be 62 weeks (434 years) leading to “Messiah the Prince” (*Dan. 9:25*). Thus, 483 years after Artaxerxes’s decree, that is, in the year A.D. 27, Jesus the Messiah is baptized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

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ What can we learn from Daniel’s intercessory prayer that can help us in our own intercessory prayer life?
- ❸ 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?
- ❹ 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?

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Daniel 9:19*

Study Focus: *Daniel 9; Jer. 25:11, 12; Jer. 29:10; 2 Kings 19:15–19; Matt. 5:16; James 5:16.*

Introduction: The main themes that call for reflection in Daniel 9 are the intercessory prayer of Daniel on behalf of his people and the prophecy about the Messiah.

Lesson Themes:

- 1. The Prayer.** Daniel offers a prayer of intercession for his people that functions as a model for our prayers today.
- 2. The Prophecy.** As a response to Daniel's prayer, God reveals His long-range saving plan. The city will be rebuilt, the Messiah will come, and the sanctuary will be anointed.

Life Application: As we reflect on Daniel's prayer and how God answered it, we learn that God is not far from any one of us. Although sin had separated us from God, through the sacrifice of Jesus, the Messiah, we are forgiven and reunited with Him. Daniel's prayer was based on the reliability of God's character and what God had done for His people in the past when He brought them out of Egypt. We have even more reasons to pray with strong confidence. The Messiah already has come and is making intercession in our behalf in the heavenly temple. In some ways, what was for Daniel a future hope is, for us, a present reality. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (*Heb. 4:16, NKJV*).

Part II: Commentary

Let us now explore the lesson's themes in more depth:

1. The Prayer

This prayer is the longest and most important prayer of Daniel. Two main motivations lie in the backdrop of this prayer. First, in Daniel 8, we learn that after his vision Daniel was physically and emotionally exhausted (*Dan. 8:27*). Daniel was shown a little horn growing and attacking God's people and setting up a false worship system. He also heard the puzzling com-

munication that after 2,300 evenings and mornings (years) the sanctuary would be cleansed/restored/vindicated. All these enigmatic features still remained obscure to him 10 years later. In particular, the chronological information about the 2,300 evenings and mornings, conveyed by an appearance or vision (*mar'eh*) of two heavenly beings, remained without explanation. Therefore, Daniel concluded his vision report by saying: "I was astonished by the [appearance/]vision" (*Dan. 8:27, NKJV*).

Second, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, in addition to his nation's exile, weighed heavily on Daniel's heart. He longed for the restoration of Jerusalem and the return of his people to their homeland. Thus, he immersed himself in the study of Jeremiah and learned that the desolations of Jerusalem would last 70 years (*Jeremiah 25, Jeremiah 29*). Therefore, the time was ripe for God to bring His people back to their land and rebuild the city. From Scripture, Daniel knew that the ultimate reason for the exile was Israel's recalcitrant rebellion against God. They transgressed the law, rejected the prophets, and broke the covenant. Thus, moved by God's Word, the prophet prays for the restoration of Jerusalem and of the temple and for his people to be forgiven. Presumably, this prayer was offered toward Jerusalem in the manner of the prayers that challenged the royal decree of Darius (*Daniel 6*).

This prayer teaches some important lessons that can help us in our own prayer life and our relationship with the Lord. Closer examination of the biblical text reveals that Daniel's prayer is profoundly biblical. A look at a cross-reference Bible shows that Daniel's prayer reverberates with several passages of Scripture. Worthy of note are the similarities between this prayer and Leviticus 26:40–45 and Deuteronomy 30:1–10. Subsequently, Ezra and Nehemiah followed Daniel's example and infused their prayers with scriptural allusions and echoes.

In addition, Daniel's petition is an intercessory prayer. His privileged position as an officer of the empire did not prevent him from identifying with his people. Some individuals forget their own people once they move up the social ladder. But Daniel fully identifies with his people; he intercedes for them as one of them. Several times he uses the pronoun "we," thus sharing responsibility for the sins of the nation and pleading with God for grace and forgiveness (*e.g., Dan. 9:5, 18, 19*). Intercessory prayer can be an opportunity to imitate Jesus. We remove ourselves from the center to focus on the needs of other people. As we pray for others, we are blessed the most. God "restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends" (*Job 42:10, NKJV*). Furthermore, Daniel's prayer was an open and sincere prayer. He admits and confesses the sin of his people and their leaders. He does not brush off the fact that they transgressed God's law and rejected the prophets; therefore, Daniel acknowledges that they fully deserve the punishment of the exile. Finally, Daniel's prayer is motivated by the desire to vindicate God's character. Thus, by restoring the people and the city, God's honor and reputation would be vindicated among the nations.

2. The Prophecy

As a response to the prayer, Gabriel—the same angel that met Daniel in chapter 8—came to reveal God’s long-range plans for the people. Let us take a look at Daniel 9:24–27 to learn some significant aspects of this most important Messianic prophecy.

First, Gabriel reached Daniel “about the time of the evening offering” (*Dan 9:21, NKJV*). The timing suggests that the angel had a message related to the sanctuary and its services. Indeed, among the things the angel came to announce and explain are: the reconstruction of the city, the atoning work of the Messiah, and the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary for Christ to commence His intercessory ministry there.

Second, this prophecy is given within a chronological framework of 70 weeks ($70 \times 7 = 490$), which is tantamount to 10 jubilees (10×49). The emphasis on the number seven may indicate the perfect salvation to be accomplished through the Messiah. Moreover, this prophetic timetable indicates that God knows the future and acts within space-time to carry out His saving plan.

Third, Gabriel comes to make Daniel “understand the vision” (*Dan. 9:23, NKJV*). The verb “understand” points back to Daniel 8, which concluded with Daniel’s not understanding the vision (*Dan. 8:27*). The word “vision” (*mar’eh*) is the same Hebrew word employed to designate the appearance of the two angelic beings and the cleansing of the sanctuary after 2,300 evenings and mornings (*Dan. 8:13, 14*).

Fourth, the prophecy of Daniel 9 provides a crucial piece of information to understand the beginning of the 2,300 evenings and mornings and, therefore, ascertain its end. According to Gabriel, 70 weeks are “determined”; this Hebrew verb means “cut,” which implies that the 70 weeks are cut, or severed, from a larger period. So, both prophecies have the same starting point, which is “the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem” (*Dan. 9:25, NKJV*). This command refers to the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 B.C. authorizing the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild Jerusalem (*Ezra 7*).

Fifth, the 70 weeks (490 years) started in 457 B.C. and ended in A.D. 34. The events that would take place during the last week took place as predicted. At the beginning of the week, Jesus the Messiah made His public appearance, being baptized by John the Baptist (A.D. 27). In the middle of the week Jesus was crucified (A.D. 31). And at the end of the week (and of the 490 years), the martyrdom of Stephen propelled the gospel message to be taken to the Gentiles.

Sixth, another crucial event that would occur during the seventh week was the anointing of the “Most Holy” (*qodesh qodashim*), which refers to the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary when Christ ascended to heaven in A.D. 31 and commenced His intercessory ministry there. This

sanctuary must be the heavenly one because the Jerusalem temple had ceased to have saving relevance in A.D. 31 when Jesus' death made the sacrificial system no longer effective.

Seventh, because 457 B.C. also is the starting point of the 2,300 evenings and mornings, the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary announced in Daniel 8:13, 14 must have begun in 1844. In that year, Christ entered the Most Holy Place in order to carry out the investigative judgment.

Eighth, amid the complexity of the prophetic figures and other details, let us not lose sight of Jesus. The events described by the prophecy culminate in the atoning work of the Messiah and indeed would benefit not only Israel but also the whole world. So, Daniel received much more than he asked for. How often God does the same for us! He can answer our prayers in ways that exceed our expectations.

Part III: Life Application

- 1. What are the main characteristics of Daniel's prayer, and what do they teach you about your personal prayer life?**

- 2. Note that Daniel gives detailed consideration to confession of sin in his prayer. How can this approach inform your own intercessory prayers? How will you change your prayer habits as a result of this study?**

- 3. Are you currently offering intercessory prayers on behalf of someone? How much knowledge do you have of his or her situation?**

- 4. What are some inappropriate attitudes that may hinder intercessory prayer?**

5. Are prophetic data such as the 70 weeks and the 2,300 evenings and mornings still relevant? Explain. What do these kinds of figures teach us about God? How can such prophetic timetables strengthen your commitment to Jesus?

6. Put yourself in the shoes of Daniel and reflect on the following:

God took about 10 years to clarify certain aspects of the chapter 8 vision to Daniel. How patient have you been as you wait for God's answers to your own spiritual and existential questions? In what ways has this waiting time prompted you to search the Scriptures for clarification and understanding?

As Daniel was praying, Gabriel was sent in response to his prayers. Have you ever received such an immediate answer to a prayer? Is such a response the way God usually answers your prayers? Explain.

How do you balance prayer and Bible reading or study in your devotional life?

7. Among the events foretold by the prophecy of Daniel 9, which one, if any, is the most important for your spiritual life, and why?
