

Daniel Chapter Nine (Part I)

Daniel 9 clearly divides into two parts. There is the **Prayer** of Daniel (vv.1-19) which is answered in a **Prophecy** for Daniel (vv.20-27). Both sections are concerned with the number **70**. Daniel's prayer makes reference to 70 years 'desolations of Jerusalem' (v.2), whilst the prophecy speaks of 70 weeks of years to bring in 'everlasting righteousness' (v.24). Whilst Daniel prays for the rebuilding and restoration of God's people, city (Jerusalem) and sanctuary (temple) according to the promise of Jeremiah, he is given a glorious revelation of the ultimate restoration of the same in the everlasting reign of Messiah. Note. vv.1-19 concern 490 years *backwards* as Israel had neglected 70 sabbatical years. The captivity lasted 70 years that the land might 'enjoy her sabbaths' (Leviticus 25.1-7; 26.33-35; 2 Chronicles 36.21). vv.20-27 concern 490 years *forwards* (v.24) at the end of which God would fulfil all His promises to His people in Messiah the Prince.

Daniel 9 is famous for the 'key to prophetic interpretation', i.e. Daniel's seventy weeks (vv.24-27). It has been called the 'crown jewels' and 'backbone' of OT prophecy. And yet 70% of the chapter records the prayer and confession of the prophet. The prophetic answer only accounts for 15% of the chapter's verses. The lesson? Prophecy, even Bible study, is important, but let it not be to the neglect of prayer and confession. *Moody: Those who have left the deepest impression on this sin-cursed earth have been men and women of prayer. Guthrie: The first sign of true spiritual life is prayer, and it is also the means of maintaining spiritual life. Man can live as well physically without breathing as spiritually without praying.* We do not well to hurry through the 'salad appetiser' assuming all the flavour and nutrients are contained within the prophetic 'main course' (McClain). Note. Daniel's confession on behalf of the nation is a foreshadow of the future repentance of Israel – which will be swiftly (cf. v.21) followed by the realisation of God's Messianic promise – the second coming of Christ to deliver His people.

The Context of the Vision [v.1]

v.1: The time of the vision is significant. The 'first year' of Darius (538-537BC) indicates that the mighty Babylonian empire has just fallen. Daniel was approximately 85 years of age, 13 years since the last vision (Daniel 8). This was the same year in which Daniel was thrown into the den of lions (Daniel 6). Given his description as one 'greatly beloved' (v.23) and relative peace and opportunity to study scripture (v.2) it is likely the events of Daniel 9 took place *after* the events of Daniel 6. God reveals truth to those who demonstrate themselves faithful to Him. *Darius* (for identification see notes on Daniel 6), likely a dynastic name (like *Pharaoh*) means 'restrainer' (cp. v.24). The passing of the Babylonian empire sets the stage for the edict of Cyrus, king of Persia, to decree the return of God's people and fulfilment of 70 years' captivity. Darius was son of 'Ahasuerus' (meaning 'lion king') who is unknown beyond this reference, and not to be confused with Xerxes (Esther 1.1). He was of Median descent, lending further credence to the suggestion he is to be identified with Cyaxares II who reigned alongside Cyrus until his death two years after the fall of Babylon.

The Concern of the Prophet [vv.2-3]

v.2: Daniel was a busy man, but he studied the word of God (even at 85!). The word 'books' (lit. 'writings') likely refers to the sacred Hebrew scriptures which were available to Daniel – the latest addition of which was the prophet Jeremiah. In reading Jeremiah, Daniel 'understood' (newly observed) the period of time God had decreed for the captivity of His people (cf. 2 Chronicles 36.20-23). There was no need to reveal this truth by vision to Daniel for God does not reveal by supernatural means what He has already revealed in His word. The divine inspiration of Jeremiah is affirmed by the 'word of the Lord' (Jehovah) he received. 'Jehovah' only occurs x7 in the book of Daniel, all in this chapter. The name signifies the eternal, immutable, covenant keeping God. His promises cannot fail, and this chapter shows *how* they will be fulfilled, whether in the *initial* or *ultimate* restoration of Israel from the captivity of Babylon *and* the nations.

Daniel may have been reading from *two* passages in the prophecy of Jeremiah. Remarkably, the words of Jeremiah 25.10-14 rang around Jerusalem at the time Nebuchadnezzar first came up against the city and took Daniel captive (606BC). In addition, Jeremiah 29.10-14 was sent in a letter to the Jewish exiles in c.597BC. The word of Jeremiah offered hope to the godly and repentant Israelite – God's discipline of the nation was measured; the period of Babylonian domination was set. *Jeremiah 29.10: For the LORD says, 'Only when the seventy years of Babylonian rule are over will I again take up consideration for you. Then I will fulfill my gracious promise to you and restore you to your homeland'.* The number 70 is written large over the period of captivity and subsequent years:

- The **rule** of Babylon lasted 70 years from 609BC (when the last Assyrian king, Ashur-uballit II, was defeated) until 539BC when Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians (Daniel 5).
- Israel experienced 70 years of **servitude** in Babylon from 606BC (Nebuchadnezzar's first foray into the land) to 536BC when they finally returned under the decree of Cyrus (538BC), Ezra 1.

- There were 70 years **desolations** of Jerusalem from 586BC (when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem) until 516BC which marked the completion of the re-built temple (Ezra 6.14-15).

v.3: Daniel therefore knew the end of 70 years of Babylonian rule was a prelude to the restoration of his people, but they had not been delivered! They were as rebellious as ever (Ezekiel 2.3-4). Would the period of captivity be prolonged if there was no seeking after God and consequent repentance (as Jeremiah 29.12-14)? Few anticipated restoration, and fewer desired it! Babylon was comfortable. Thus, Daniel immediately and earnestly cried out to God on behalf of his people (Jeremiah 29.12-14). He became a mediator (as Moses, Ezra and Nehemiah). Notice, he did not regard prayer to be unnecessary, as if God would fulfil His word in any case. Rather he saw it as one means God uses of accomplishing His will – he became a partner with God in the fulfilling of divine purpose. Daniel ‘set his face’ (cf. 6.10), or resolutely turned from earthly distraction to concentrate on heavenly communion. It was the word of God that informed and energised his prayers (Psalm 119.24; Revelation 22.20). The word of God should constantly drive us to prayer in worship, thanksgiving, and identification with the will of God (1 John 5.14). Daniel spoke to his *Lord (Adonai) God (Elohim)*. These names speak of the God who is sovereign owner and ruler over creation and the creature, and thus able to hear and answer Daniel’s prayer. His special, personal appeal to seek the favour of his God (supplication) was **fervent** demonstrated by his self-denial and self-discipline. He wasn’t too proud to sit in the dust (sackcloth and ashes), or too disingenuous to be distracted by food (fasting). At a basic level, these terms are often associated with mourning and death – this is genuine repentance and contrition likened to grief at a graveside. *Tatford: Only too frequently Christian prayer lacks earnestness, fervour and reality: it is ineffective because it costs little. The supplication which draws down power from above usually involves sacrifice and self-abnegation, but how many today would give up a meal or a night’s sleep to spend the time in heartfelt intercession. Sacrificial prayer is relatively unknown and therein may lie one of the major reasons for the lack of blessing at the present day.*

The Confession of Sin [vv.4-14]

v.4: Daniel’s prayer has already involved *contrition*. Now he turns to *commendation* of the character of God (v.4b) and *confession* (vv.5-14) before *crying* for mercy (vv.15-19). In using the word ‘confession’ Daniel is embracing the nation’s sins as his own. *Larkin: The most spotless character outside of Christ associates himself as a sinner with his people.* As one in close communion with God, Daniel was sensitive to the true depth of his own failings and the sin of his people. Before rushing to petition (v.19), he exalts the character of God (cf. Luke 11.2). He is ‘great’ (powerful) and ‘dreadful’ (awe-inspiring in majesty and thus worthy of honour and glory). He is therefore a God who *can* and *does* answer prayer. God is also faithful, literally ‘keeping the covenant and the steadfast love’ (cf. Deuteronomy 7.9). It is possible Daniel has the Abrahamic (land) covenant in view and is making appeal to the loyal love of God by which he faithfully keeps His promises to His people. It is those that love God who keep His commandments and experience the blessing He longs to give.

v.5: Note the chiasmic structure of Daniel’s prayer. First, he describes the sins of the nation. They had ‘sinned’ (to morally miss the mark or fall short), ‘committed iniquity’ (morally bent or twisted out of shape, perverse), ‘done wickedly’ (habitual and premeditated evil) and ‘rebelled’ against God by ‘turning aside’ from His word – more specifically, by ‘transgressing’ the law (v.11a). **v.6:** Every class of society had not only denied the *written*, but also the *spoken* word of God (cf. v.10) through the ‘prophets’. Israel should have ‘walked’ in obedience but had long strayed from the beaten path. **v.7:** No blame for the nation’s disobedience could be attributed to God. He was acting ‘righteously’ in His holy discipline of the nation. The captivity of both the *northern* (Assyria) and *southern* (Judah) kingdoms had brought ‘confusion of faces’ (open shame) upon them – but it was all due to their wilful disobedience (trespass) of the law (cf. Deuteronomy 28.48-57, 64-68). **v.9:** Nevertheless, God was a God of ‘mercies’ (compassion) and ‘forgivenesses’. ‘Mercies’ is the plural form of the Hebrew word for ‘womb’ and thus carries the picture of the tender care bestowed upon a vulnerable infant. **v.8:** The chiasmic emphasis of Daniel’s confession is very simple – ‘we have sinned against thee’.

- A Sin list (v. 5)
- B Failure to listen (v. 6)
- C God’s character (v. 7a)
- D Israel’s character (v. 7b)
- E Vocative Address “O YHWH!” (v. 8a)
- D’ Israel’s character (v. 8b)
- C’ God’s character (v. 9)
- B’ Failure to listen (v. 10)
- A’ Sin list (v. 11a)

v.11b: The last part of Daniel’s confession (vv.11b-14) describes the effect of such disobedience upon the nation. In breaking the law of Moses, God had ‘poured out’ its associated curses upon the nation as a flood (cf. Deuteronomy 28.15-68). **v.12:** God ‘confirmed’ (caused His word to stand) by bringing the ‘disaster’ of desolation upon Jerusalem in 586BC. **v.13:** Despite such calamity no penitential prayer had been made. Divine discipline had no effect. They did not ‘entreat the face (favour) of Jehovah’ in bowing themselves in repentance before Him. There was no acknowledgment of their spiritual and moral sickness (cf. Isaiah 1.5-6), no ‘turning’ from their perversity or showing devotion to the

'truth' of God. **v.14:** Jehovah was watchful over His word to perform it (cf. Jeremiah 1.12), both in blessing *and* cursing, which righteously executed the sentence of justice (i.e. exile) upon them for their disobedience.

A Cry for Restoration [vv.15-19]

v.15: Only now does Daniel come to his prayer's petition, the primary thrust of which is found in v.16. But the great theme of his petition is not personal or national gain – that is a *secondary* matter. Primarily, his prayer is for 'the Lord's sake' (v.17), for the city and people called by 'thy name' (vv.18, 19). In fact, Daniel uses the words 'thy', 'thee' and 'thine' 19 times in vv.15-19. The true purpose of prayer is the glory and honour of God. *Smith: His whole heart is concerned in the interests of God upon the earth.*

Daniel seeks divine forgiveness and restoration on the ground of redemption. Israel was a people 'brought forth' from Egypt by blood and power – they belonged to their Lord (Adonai) by right of purchase. Such mighty acts had promoted the 'renown' (name) of the Lord (cf. Joshua 2.9-11). Surely a *second* exodus, this time from Babylon, would accrue further glory to the Lord's name! **v.16:** God was 'righteous' in punishing His people for their sins (v.14), now Daniel appeals to the same righteousness to turn away divine wrath from the city of Jerusalem (cf. Leviticus 26.40-44; Jeremiah 29.14). The personal pronoun 'thy' declares God's individual interest in His city and 'holy mountain' of Zion. Presently, they stood as monuments of divine judgment but could be restored to the honour of God once again. The people had become a 'reproach', a public object of mockery and scorn. **v.17:** Daniel claims Elohim as 'our God' – significant given the history of idolatry that exiled the nation to Babylon in the first place. Daniel calls upon God to 'hear' three times (vv.17-19), the very thing Israel had repeatedly failed to do (vv.10, 11, 14). His concern was not just the city, but that God might cause his 'face to shine' (favour) upon the sanctuary too. This was fulfilled when the temple's foundation was laid in the days of Zerubbabel (536BC) and finished under the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah (516BC). **v.18:** After speaking of the 'face' of God, Daniel appeals to divine *ears* and *eyes* for gracious provision. The ground of appeal was not the filthy rag righteousnesses of the nation, but rather the 'mercies' (great compassions) of a loving God. **v.19:** The final, passionate crescendo of Daniel's prayer comprises short petitions addressed to the 'Lord' (Adonai) – the sovereign God of limitless resources. It is a final appeal for God to vindicate His name and honour by forgiving and restoring His people without delay!