

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Tel: 0845 603 0630. Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Dr. Gordon Hughes

Daniel's Prayer and Confession; the 70 weeks - Daniel 9

Today we come to the third in our series of talks on the relevance of the book of Daniel for the 21st century. We will look at chapter 9. The chapter divides naturally into two parts:

- Daniel's prayer verses 1-19
- Daniel's revelation verses 20-27.

It is worth noting, in passing, that the two are connected. It is to the man or woman who is prepared to seek God's face that God will make Himself known. Moses reminded the Israelites: "You will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 4:29). Daniel's prayer arose out of his reading of the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah had plainly foretold that, although God would deal with His people, the Jews, in judgment for their idolatry so that they would be carried away captive to Babylon, after 70 years He would bring them back to their land (Jeremiah 25:11-14 and 29:10). Daniel was amongst those who had been carried away captive and probably recognised that this time of captivity was drawing to its close.

Two things mark Daniel:

1. An intense love for the place where God's honour had dwelt, Jerusalem.
2. An undying affection for God's people.

Today, as Christians, we should be equally concerned for the honour of God in a world which, by and large, dishonours Him. We also need that deep affection for His people, our fellow Christians, everywhere.

Daniel turns to God with fasting, sackcloth and ashes (verse 3), the traditional Jewish marks of repentance. It is surely significant that what his nation had so signally failed to do i.e. turn to God confessing their sins and disobedience, Daniel now does. But this was no outward formality only on Daniel's part. Rather it was a real pouring out of his heart to God. Earlier God had lamented the need for the carrying away of His people to Babylon, "So I sought for a man among them who would ... stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none" (Ezekiel 22:30). Now Daniel stands in the gap, as it were, before God for his nation.

Daniel's prayer

The prayer divides into two:

- confession (verses 1-15);
- intercession (verses 16-19).

Please take time after this broadcast to read carefully through this deeply moving prayer. We have time this morning to read only a few verses: "And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, 'O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments ... O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face, as it is this day - to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel ... To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him'" (verses 4-9).

Note Daniel's frank confession: "We have sinned". In fact, Daniel uses the words 4 times over in this prayer. This was no "I and they" but Daniel stands solidly with his people. This despite the fact that Daniel's life was one of pleasing God. Indeed, 3 times in this book Daniel is addressed as "greatly beloved" (9:23; 10:11 and 19). In similar vein, Ezra, deeply concerned for the disobedience of his people, could pray, "O my God: I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God: for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens" (Ezra 9:6).

Note that there is no attempt on Daniel's part to blame God for the distress in which the Jews found themselves in Babylon. Indeed, Daniel frankly acknowledges the righteousness of God in dealing with His people in such judgment: "As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth. Therefore the LORD has kept the disaster, and brought it upon us; for the LORD our God is righteous in all the works which He does, though we have not obeyed His voice." Daniel's subjection of spirit contrasts beautifully with that proud spirit that today is so ready to blame God when disaster strikes! After Daniel's confession, it is time now to look at Daniel's intercession

Daniel's prayer continues, "Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate. O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies" (verses 17-18).

More than ever today we need men and women who will stand in the gap, as it were, and turn to God in intercession for the needs of others. Such a ministry of intercession is enjoined on us as a priority in the New Testament. Paul writes to his young son in the faith, Timothy, "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and for all who are in authority that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour" (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

You may feel somewhat shut in with seemingly little opportunity of serving the Lord. But we can all pray! This ministry of intercession must rank high in God's priorities for us. Just in the quietness of our own room we can bring before our omnipotent and prayer-answering God the needs of others - our family and friends, the needs of our local community, of our nation, and of the world, saved and unsaved.

Great men and women of God have been marked by this spirit of intercession. Listen to the prayer of Moses as he interceded with God for his people after they had sinned against God in worshipping the golden calf: "Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, 'Oh, these people have sinned a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin - but if not, I pray thee, blot me out of Your book which You have written'" (Exodus 32:31-32). The apostle Paul prayed similarly: "I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh ... Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved" (Romans 9:3 and 10:1).

It is important to notice that Daniel does not plead with God on the basis of his people's goodness, but rather on the mercies of God: "... not ... because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies" (verse 18). That same mercy of God must always be the ground of God's blessing, whether for the sinner turning to God for salvation or for the believer seeking the help of God. The story is told of a lady, whose features plainly showed the ravages of time, sitting before the artist who was to paint her portrait and saying, "Now mind you do me justice". The artist was heard to mutter, "Madam, what you need is not justice but mercy"! In a spiritual sense, that is true of all of us. So Paul writes, "You ... were by nature the children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Ephesians 2:3-5).

So Daniel counts on the mercy of God. Sure enough, perhaps not long after, we read, "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying ... 'Who is there among you of all His people? May his God be with him! Now let him go up to Jerusalem ... and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He is God)'" (Ezra 1:1-3). God always keeps His promises!

Daniel's revelation.

Daniel, as we have seen was a man "greatly beloved" by God. Because of this, and because of his great love for his people and for the city of Jerusalem, Daniel receives a special revelation from God. Through His servant, the angel Gabriel, God reveals to Daniel His plans for the future of His people and for Jerusalem. We'll read part of it: "Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall even in troublesome times. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined" (verses 24-26).

We have time this morning only to look at the broad outline of this prophecy. We should note firstly that the prophecy concerns "your people and ... your holy city" i.e. the Jews and Jerusalem. The church is not a part of this prophecy. Secondly, the word translated "weeks" is more properly "sevens". These sevens may be sevens of days or, as seems likely here, sevens of years. This period of "seventy sevens" i.e. 490 years would begin at "the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem". The command of Cyrus, king of Persia, in the first year of his reign, for the return of the Jews after their seventy years of captivity was specifically with a view to "build [God] a house at Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:2). Similarly, when a second wave of Jews returned at the command of king Artaxerxes in the seventh year of his reign, this was also with a view that their offerings were to be "for the house of their God in Jerusalem" (Ezra 7:16). It was only in the twentieth year of the reign of king Artaxerxes that Nehemiah was sent to Jerusalem with authorisation to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. This can be dated as 454 BC

The first 7 sevens i.e. 49 years would be the time taken to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. This would then be followed by a period of 62 sevens i.e. 434 years. After all these years i.e. 483 years, the prophecy declared that "Messiah shall be cut off". This would correspond with the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus at Calvary around AD 30. Allowing for some slight uncertainty in dates, the correspondence is striking. After that, the prophecy goes on, "the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary". The Lord Jesus Himself had foretold that after His death Jerusalem would be surrounded by hostile armies (Luke 21:20). History confirms that Jerusalem with its temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. The correspondence of Daniel's revelation with history is so striking that unbelieving critics have claimed that Daniel could not possibly have written this book and that it must have been written sometime after AD 70. The Christian readily accepts this prophecy as confirmation of what Paul wrote to Timothy: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (or literally, 'God-breathed')" (2 Timothy 3:16).

But the revelation to Daniel continues: "And he (that is, the prince who is to come) shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator" (verse 27). This clearly refers to a future event but we can be sure that, just as certainly as the first part of the revelation has been so accurately fulfilled, so will this prophecy.

There is not time to go into all that details of this prophecy. To be properly understood, it needs to be read in conjunction with the book of Revelation. We can summarise briefly the events that will take place. Let us just remind ourselves that the church is not part of this prophecy which concerns the Jews and Jerusalem only. If you like, after the death of the Lord Jesus, God's prophetic clock stopped. It will start again at some future date when these remaining 7 years will run their course. That time, we believe, is after the church, that is, all true believers including those who are alive and those who have died, is raptured to heaven to be with the Lord when He comes for them (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

After some time, not specified in Scripture, this period of 7 years will begin to run its course. It will begin with the prince of verse 26 making a covenant of peace with the Jews for seven years. After three and a half years, he will break off this covenant and the remaining three and a half years will be an unprecedented time of trouble and persecution for the Jews. Jerusalem will be besieged by its enemies and will be in great distress. This period of seven years is referred to as "the great tribulation" (Revelation 7:14) and "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7). At the end of the 7 years, the Lord Jesus will return with His church in glory. All the enemies of the Jews will be put down and the Lord will establish His millennial kingdom with Jerusalem as its centre. This 1,000 year reign will be a time of universal peace and righteousness, not only for the Jews but for all mankind.

So today, let us rejoice in the fact that we have to do with a God who is still in control of His world and who always keeps His word. His promises are sure and certain. Just before the cross, the Lord Jesus promised His disciples, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3). That is the next event in God's prophetic scheme of things. May He find us ready and waiting for His return!

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