

“Answers to Prayer”

Daniel 9:20-27

If you have your Bible, let me invite you to turn with me once more to the ninth chapter of Daniel. After a few brief weeks of being away, I want to pick back up in our study through Daniel. One of the greatest and most wonderful truths we are taught in Daniel is that the kingdoms of this world are passing away and the kingdom of heaven is coming to pass. The time is coming when all the kingdoms of this world will belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, and this is an unshakeable truth that we are given in God’s Word.

David Jeremiah—*“Christians should be the calmest people on earth. We have no right to run around this world in frenzied activity, staying up and walking the floor at night, wondering what is going to happen. God in heaven rules the kingdoms of men.”*

Daniel stood like an iron pillar in a hurricane because the sovereign God of the universe was also the sovereign God of his life. He is one of the most important characters in the Old Testament, a man of courage under fire, a man who swam upstream against a heavy current of cultural opposition. His story has far reaching significance for us, especially against the backdrop of today’s spiritual, moral, and political climate that can best be described as chaotic and corrupt. Daniel reminds us that we aren’t the first of God’s people to face such challenging times.

O.S. Hawkins—*“Daniel wrote the book on how God’s people can survive in a pagan, permissive, and perverted culture. He was born in Jerusalem and grew up there until he was taken captive to Babylon as a young man. He found himself uprooted from a Jewish culture built upon the Mosaic moral law and dropped into one that was foreign to everything he had known and been taught. Daniel could have spent his energy blaming his circumstances on societal ills, the court system of his day, government policies, political leaders, or the educational system, just as we Christians in our contemporary culture can place blame today. However, Daniel steps off the pages of Scripture and into our modern culture to reveal some principles that can enable us not to simply survive in our culture but to engage it, thrive in it, and even be used of God to transform it.”*

Three options—condone, condemn, or confront!

Daniel's example of how to live and even thrive in the most godless of environments is a lesson that we don't want to miss. And this is why it is so relevant to where we find ourselves today. Daniel was successful in Babylon largely because he was a man of passionate **prayer**, a truth that is emphasized in this ninth chapter. He is a praying man.

Lehman Strauss—*“There are three significant chapters in the Old Testament, all of them containing a prayer of a similar nature: Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9, and Daniel 9. In each instance a servant of God was on his knees before the Word of God, earnestly interceding for the people of God. The Old Testament prophets did not sit in a passive state waiting for a revelation from God through a dream, a vision, or a voice. They spent time in prayer searching for the message and meaning of prophecy.”*

1 Peter 1:10-12—**“Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.”**

That is what Daniel is doing here in this ninth chapter. He has been carefully searching and inquiring, pouring over the revealed Word of God, and praying earnestly for God's intervention on Israel's behalf. The answer to his prayer is given at the close of the chapter. God reveals to Daniel the plan for Israel's future in what many have referred to as the backbone of prophecy. As we consider this text, notice:

1—The PATTERN that is reflected (9:20)

“While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the Lord my God for the holy hill of my God,”

Like all true Old Testament prophets, prayer was a vital part of Daniel's life. That he was a man of frequent prayer is something that we have been made aware of throughout our study of the book. When faced with threats, chapter 2 reveals that he sought the face of God through prayer. In chapter 6, we read that it was his habit to pray three times a day, a practice that he continued even when a law had been passed to make it illegal. It was his commitment to prayer that resulted in him being cast into the lions' den. Chapter 9 shows us a fervent prayer that he prayed in response to something he had seen while in his study of God's Word. Now, I don't want to say too much about this because we have already looked at Daniel's prayer. But it is important for us to keep in mind that this prayer provides us with a dynamic pattern for our own prayer lives. What type of pattern do we find in Daniel's prayer?

A scriptural pattern

The prayer that is recorded in this chapter was rooted in Daniel's own personal Bible study. He had lived through nearly 70 years of the Babylonian captivity. By this point, he is in his 80's, a man whose life and position of influence should have allowed him to live a worry free life. David Jeremiah says he could have collected his Social Security check, wrapped himself in a Persian shawl, and let some-body else worry about the world's problems. But he does not do that. Instead, the first few verses of chapter 9 tell us that he had his Bible open. He is in serious study of the prophetic Scriptures that the Jews had been careful to bring with them from Jerusalem those many years ago. In particular, Daniel had been reading from the scroll of the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah had warned Judah of coming judgment and that God's people would be carried away into captivity for some seventy years. Daniel had lived through almost all seventy of those years. As he kept reading, he discovered that the end of those seventy years was close. He knew that God was not finished with His people, and He had not forgotten the promise He had made to Abraham and David. The Lord had promised to visit His people and restore them and bring them back into their land at the end of the seventy years:

Jeremiah 29:10-11 — “For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you My promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

As he was reading the Word of God, Daniel realized that the time for the return of God’s people was drawing near. It was time for God to bring the Jews back to their land, back to Jerusalem, back to what they had been promised. God had said, “For 70 years I am going to allow the Babylonians to hold you in captivity, but then I’m going to judge them.” Daniel had seen it come to pass as Babylon had fallen to the Medes and Persians. He knew that at the end of the 70 years, there would be the destruction of Babylon, which had happened. Yet there would also be a restoration for God’s people and He would bring them back home from captivity. That is what Daniel is reading in the books. He knew that time was drawing to a close, and God was going to honor His promises.

And so when Daniel read all of that, it affected him so deep within his spirit that fell on his knees and began to pray in response. It is his reaction to the truth that he read from God’s Word. The truth of Scripture drove Daniel to his knees, and through prayer he seeks the face of God. His prayer is based upon God’s promises. He is doing the very thing that Solomon did at the dedication of the temple all those centuries before. Do you remember that from 2 Chronicles 6-7? Daniel’s confidence in those promises did not make him complacent in his faith, but energized his prayer life. It reflects a pattern for prayer that is important for us to follow. The truth of God’s Word is intended to drive us to our knees, just as it did for Daniel.

A sincere pattern

Notice how he approaches God in verse 3, “Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking Him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.” Daniel is on his knees before God with a sincere and fervent heart. It speaks of the intensity with which he prays. This is not the prayer of man who is at ease. This is not the posture of someone who is going through a comfortable little ritual that is void of

passionate expression. Rather, it is the intense cry of a heart that is gripped by truth, a mind that is enraptured, an all-consuming reflex of the soul. In other places, we read where fervent expressions are associated with prayer. For example:

Job 1:20—“Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, fell on the ground, and worshiped.”

Nehemiah 1:4—“As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.”

Hebrews 5:7—“In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence.”

Elsewhere in the Bible, we read that praying was so fervent that it was accompanied by crying, voices raised in unison, houses shaking, sighs, groans, and even sweat drops of blood. By today’s standards, such fervency would seem fanatical. Yet perhaps we’ve gone in the opposite direction with emotionless, even heartless expression.

Daniel is an example of what it means to pray with sincere and fervent expression. Notice the sincerity of his heart in what he asks for in verses 17-18:

“Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for Your own sake, O Lord, make Your face to shine upon Your sanctuary, which is desolate. O my God, incline Your ear and hear. Open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by Your name. For we do not present our pleas before You because of our righteousness, but because of Your great mercy.”

Let me tell you, that is the type of praying that God hears and responds to. God hears the sincere prayer of the man or woman who is devoted to Him. James says that the effectual, prayer of a righteous man avails much. It has God’s ear. Daniel asks the Lord, “Incline Your ear and hear! Open Your eyes and see!” He was well aware that God will not listen to some prayers. Some prayers are so unacceptable to Him that

plugs His ears so that He cannot hear and covers His eyes so that He cannot see. He is not moved by man's eloquence or vain repetition or any other religious hocus pocus. But when a man whose heart is right begins to sincerely pray on the basis of Christ, God's ears are open, God's eyes are attentive, and God's hands are outstretched to answer that prayer.

A submissive pattern

Notice in verse 20 that Daniel says, "I was presenting my plea before the Lord my God." That is, he knew the One he was calling upon. In fact, the only time the covenant name of God is used in the book is found here in Daniel's prayer where it is found on Daniel's lips no less than eight times. He uses all three of the proper names of God that are found in the Old Testament—Yahweh, Adonai, Elohim.

His approach is not flippant or casual, neither is he overly familiar. With a sense of reverential awe and submission, Daniel makes his petitions known to God. His prayer is full of words of worship, adoration, and praise. In verse 4:

- He recognizes God's transcendence
- He magnifies God's majesty
- He praises God's faithfulness

That is the kind of praying that God answers, the prayer that is soaked with a sense of submitted worship. There is nothing nonchalant about this prayer. Daniel has a high view of God. We suffer from a low view of God that does not recognize His sovereign authority over our lives. And it shows up in how we pray and approach worship.

I mean do we really know just who it is that we are calling upon? When we pray, we call upon:

- the God who unrolled the blueprint for the foundation of the world before the dawn of time.

- the God who called the cosmos out of nothing with His own voice, declaring, “Let there be light!”
- the God who set the earth spinning on its axis and keeps it spinning at 1000 miles per hour.
- the God who lit the sun up like a tiki torch, which is really nothing in comparison to the radiance of His face.
- the God who flung the untold billions upon billions of stars into the night sky.
- the God who gave the lion his roar, the eagle his soar.
- the God who took a lump of clay and fashioned a man in His own image, after His own likeness, and breathed into that man the breath of life.
- the God who robed Himself in flesh, was born into our world, was crucified on a cross to bear our sin.

Do you know just who it is that you are calling upon when you pray? Daniel did. When you don't begin your prayers the way he did, you'll not experience the conclusion to your prayers the way he did—with a clear answer.

A sensitive pattern

Not only is his prayer a scriptural pattern and a sincere pattern and a submissive pattern, but it also serves as a sensitive pattern. He has understood something about the holiness of God as well as his own sin. Daniel's fervency is best understood when you consider it against the backdrop of Israel's sin and failure. He is well aware of the fact that national sin had resulted in calamity. Yet he doesn't point an accusatory finger at others while patting himself on the back. Instead, he identifies with the the sin of his people. Look at what he says in verse 5:

“We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from Your commandments and rules.”

He says in verse 20, “While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel.” He is sensitive when it comes to his sin and need. This is one of the most overlooked principles of prayer that ought to be rediscovered today in our generation. The prophets of the Old Testament always identified themselves with the sins of their people. Jesus taught His disciples to pray in this way, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” This may sound like a radical concept in our day of pointing fingers and condemning the sins of everyone else. Until we can get a sense of corporate responsibility before God, we will never experience a move of God like we could if we would all follow Daniel’s example here. Answered prayer is a matter of whether or not we honestly confess our sin and repent, not trying to justify it or make excuses for it.

1 John 1:9—“If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

A specific pattern

The petitions that Daniel offers to God in prayer are seen in verses 16-19 as he asks God to turn His wrath away from Jerusalem. He asks God for mercy and to make His face shine once more upon the sanctuary which was desolate. All for the sake of God’s name and God’s glory, he asks the Lord to forgive Israel’s sin and restore them once more to the place where God had caused His name to dwell. As he comes to the end of his prayer, Daniel is simply magnifying and glorifying God. He is not praying for his own safety. He is not looking out for number one. His comfort is of no concern to him. Instead, he is radically God-centered.

Now, I have said all of that to say this—true prayer, the kind of prayer we find in Daniel 9, is motivated by God’s Word, it is fervent in its expression, honest in its confession, and it is ultimately concerned for God’s glory above all else. It is this kind of prayer that is offered in Jesus’ name that God delights in answering.

2—The PERCEPTION that is received (9:21-23a)

“while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, ‘O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved.’”

The pattern that is reflected in Daniel’s prayer is important for us to keep in mind for the sake of our own prayer lives. But notice also that Daniel receives some keen insight in response to his prayer. Some light is shed into his situation as the result of his praying. As he prayed, he anticipated an answer concerning the seventy years of captivity that were just about to be completed. Those years represented 490 years of Israel’s failure to observe the Sabbath law that required the land to lay fallow every seventh year. Thus, there would be one year of captivity for every Sabbath year that they ignored.

2 Chronicles 36:20-21 — “He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.”

That part Daniel understood from Scripture. However, he was in for a shock. Because instead of dealing with the 490 years that were in the past, God was about to give him a glimpse into the 490 years that were in the future. The answer to his prayer would come many centuries later. He is given perception into the will of God for the future.

The messenger

In verse 21, Daniel says that while he was speaking in prayer, Gabriel came to him in swift flight. It is the angel Gabriel who is always bringing important news of some kind involving God’s redemptive plan. Some 500 years later, it would be Gabriel who announces to Mary that she had been chosen to give birth to the Messiah. When Gabriel shows up, it is always to announce the news that God is up to something. In

just a minute, I'm going to show you how there is a connection between these two events.

What I want you to see here is that even before Daniel had finished praying, Gabriel was there with an answer. He is there at the time of the evening sacrifice, which would have been 3pm, or the ninth hour. It was also a time for prayer.

The message

If Gabriel is the messenger sent from God, what then was his message? Notice how the purpose of Gabriel's coming to Daniel is stated in verses 22-23

"He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, 'O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved.'"

He came to inform Daniel and to help him understand what was involved in the plan of God for the future of His people. He refers to Daniel as someone who is 'greatly loved.' It is the same way that Jesus referred to the Apostle John. He is described as the disciple whom Jesus loved. Daniel and John also share another interesting parallel— they are the two greatest sources of prophetic revelation in the Bible. They were both the chosen recipients of a revelation that concerned the future that was not given to anyone else.

God gives Daniel some perception that comes only after he had spent time on his knees in prayer. The insight that he receives into his situation comes supernaturally. He looks through eyes of faith and listens with an ear that is tuned to the voice from another world.

Prayer is the one and only option for responding to the things that you would change if you could, but you've tried in your own strength and cannot.

- It is what Moses did when the burden of leading the people of Israel got the best of him

- It is what Jehoshaphat did when he didn't know what to do about the nations that were planning to attack
- It is what Nehemiah did when received news about the broken down walls of Jerusalem
- It is what David did when he retreated into a cave on the run from Saul and his henchmen
- It is what the church did when they found out that Peter had been arrested and was marked to die
- It is what Paul and Silas did at midnight in the bowels of a Philippian jail
- It is what Jesus Himself did in Gethsemane's garden as he agonized over the looming shadow of the cross

And it is what Daniel does as he wrestles over the pitiful situation of Jerusalem's desolation. It is in response to his prayer that God dispatches Gabriel with an answer.

3—The PROPHECY that is revealed (9:23b)

"Therefore consider the word and understand the vision."

We will come back to this later on, but the message that is given to Daniel by the angel Gabriel has been referred to as the prophecy of the seventy weeks. And it serves as a prophetic timetable of future events concerning Israel and the coming of Christ. Daniel has been burdened over the situation of the exile, concerned about how God would fulfill His promise now that Israel had failed. It was this burden that brought him to his knees in prayer. But the answer that he is given is one of the greatest prophecies in all of the Bible as God makes it known to the old prophet that He is not finished with His people. God had decreed that there would be a specific amount of time that would yet pass to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for inquiry, to bring in everlasting righteousness. It would all be centered around the coming of an Anointed One who would be cut off and seemingly have nothing.

Now, I've got to stop here this morning. But have you ever been burdened to such a degree that it brought you to your knees? Whether it be family problems, personal demons and struggles, disappointments and heartaches, or the emptiness left in sin's wake. We often go through life thinking we can handle the stuff that comes our way, and when things get bad, then we pray. Where there is an absence of prayer, there is an attitude of self-sufficiency.

1 Peter 5:6-7—“Humble yourself, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.”

Philippians 4:6-7—“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

One day, there was a certain pastor who visited with a very distraught member of his congregation. When she had told him about what was going on in her life, she pleaded with him, “Brother Hoffman, what shall I do?” He really didn't know what to say to her. He read a few verses of Scripture and tried to give her the best practical advice he could offer so he said, “You cannot do better than to take all of your sorrows to Jesus. You must tell Jesus.”

Surprisingly, this off-the-cuff counsel encouraged her heart. It wasn't long before her countenance completely changed. And with joy in her heart, she agreed with her pastor, “Yes, I must tell Jesus!” Well, that pastor just so happened to be Elisha Hoffman. When he returned to his study, he couldn't get those words out of his mind. I must tell Jesus, I must tell Jesus! Before the day was out, he had crafted the words to the hymn that has comforted so many for more than a century:

*I must tell Jesus all of my trials,
I cannot bear these burdens alone.
In my distress He kindly will help me,*

He ever loves and cares for His own.