

Daniel 9:1–6 (ESV)

1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans— **2** in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. **3** Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. **4** I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, “O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, **5** we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. **6** We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

Why pray if God has already promised?

Our passage this morning forces us to look at some questions we may have.

Why study, even if God is using you to create scripture?

Why pray, if God has already promised to do the thing you are praying for?

Why repent, if you are already in right relationship with Christ?

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Daniel has been given several visions and he has interpreted others. In them he has seen things that have **shocked** him and **made him sick**. One of the things he has learned is that Babylon is going to be punished by God. He already knew this prior to this morning.

Well, seeing that he is now in the first year of Darius, Daniel is telling us that Babylon the great has fallen. Belshazzar was defeated. The city was captured. The king was killed.

This inspires Daniel to study. Now think about this. Here is Daniel who the Lord reveals stuff to directly. He sends him visions. He sends him angels. He allows him to interpret dreams. Why does Daniel not calculate it like this? Why does

Daniel not think, **“Well if God wants me to know something He will just tell me”?** Daniel clearly feels the need here to **study** scripture. And if Daniel felt that he needed to study scripture, surely **we** need to study even more than he did. God has never used **us** to write scripture.

Daniel read the book of **Jeremiah**.

It is important to note how Daniel referred to Jeremiah’s writing.

according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet

Daniel saw Jeremiah’s writings as **authoritative scripture**. This is an encouragement to us to know that **even back then** men of God were recognizing their contemporaries as **providing scripture that they could rely upon**. Daniel banked on the fact that what Jeremiah wrote **was from God** and it **would happen**.

Now Daniel knows that from the time that the Jewish people leave Jerusalem to when they appear again that it will take 70 years. How did he know that?

Well God made it very clear in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 25:10–14 (ESV)

10 Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp. 11 This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 12 Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste. 13 I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. 14 For many nations and great kings shall make slaves even of them, and I will recompense them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.”

Jeremiah 29:10–14 (ESV)

10 “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. 11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the

nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

Notice that Jeremiah does not just tell us **what God will do**. He tells us what the **attitude of His people** will be. He tells us what the people **should** be, and **will** be doing. They will be seeking Him. They will be **calling upon Him**.

Now not only did Jeremiah reveal the timing. Isaiah revealed the name of the person in ultimate power. He named the King that would do this, maybe before the King was even born.

Daniel probably had access to the writings of Isaiah as well. So here would have been another piece of the puzzle. Cyrus was the person who would allow all of this.

Isaiah 44:26–28 (ESV)

26 who confirms the word of his servant and fulfills the counsel of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be inhabited,’ and of the cities of Judah, ‘They shall be built, and I will raise up their ruins’; 27 who says to the deep, ‘Be dry; I will dry up your rivers’; 28 who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose’; saying of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be built,’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid.’ ”

[I am the LORD,]

And more in the following chapter.

Isaiah 45:1–2 (ESV)

1 Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: 2 “I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron,

It is no wonder that Daniel knew he should prepare.

Daniel serves as a very good example for us about **how to prepare for the future**. Study the word of God. No matter how much truth you received in the past, we always need to be **pressing on**. Daniels response to being given supernatural truth is to study God’s word even more diligently. He wanted to find everything He could that would reveal God’s will about these events.

And then, once he knew it, he was driven to action.

Isn’t it interesting that Daniel takes more constructive action after **reading** the word of God than he did from **receiving all of the supernatural experiences** he

received. This is not a principle, but it is just interesting. Even prophets are moved to action by reading simple words on a simple page without all the mystical revelation. You and I are not being **short changed** when we are given the Bible to read. It is truly all we need. Even if God were speaking to us directly, we would still drastically need the written Word.

So Daniel knows that it will be **70 years** in captivity and then the people will be allowed to return to Jerusalem. By this time Daniel had been in captivity about 67 years. So the time is drawing near. He even knows that Cyrus is the main power that was prophesied to overcome Babylon and he will be the one that decrees the Jewish people free to return to their homeland. So Daniel saw that happen just like Isaiah and Jeremiah said. Everything is set for Cyrus to make his decree. This had to be exciting to Daniel. Daniel was probably in his mid 80's by now so he will not be making the journey. But it might be while he is still alive. Prophecy is being fulfilled right in front of his very eyes. Wow. Many believe we are seeing the same sorts of things.

So Daniel knows his decree. He has perfect trust in the sovereignty of God. So **how does Daniel respond** to his new understanding?

3 Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

What? He knows that this thing is going to happen. He knows God will do what He says. He trusts that God never lies. Why does he not go rejoicing into the Jewish communities. Why does he respond as he does?

We need to remember what Jeremiah said earlier.

12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

This not only describes **what God** is going to do. It describes what **God's people** will do.

We need to remember why God sent the Jews into exile in the first place. It was due to disobedience. It was due to rebellion. Now the people must call out to God in repentance. That is the condition of the people that God brings back from captivity.

I think it was Spurgeon who was once asked how he reconciles God's Sovereignty and Man's responsibility. He replied I never have to reconcile friends. Both of these function together perfectly.

Daniel got this right. When God showed Daniel what **God** was going to do, Daniel had an even greater desire to do what God **told His people to do**.

If Daniel were to have been asked, why did you respond by praying and repenting, Daniel would likely say, in view of God's goodness, what else could I do but that which He commands.

If we want to understand why we pray, why we evangelize, why we obey, we must understand this.

Good theology never confuses what **God says He WILL do** and what God tells men they **MUST** do.

God **tells us** that it is He who will awaken a spiritually dead man from the dead.

God **commands** every man everywhere to repent.

God **tells us** that God has chosen every person who will come to Him from the beginning of time.

God **commands** us to preach the gospel to every person we have the opportunity to.

God **tells us** He has chosen people from every tribe and nation.

God **commands us** to get the gospel to all those people.

God **told** Jeremiah that He was going to bring people back to Jerusalem in 70 years after they left.

God **commanded** that people repent after they were taken to captivity.

Good theology never confuses what God says He **WILL** do and what God tells men they **MUST** do. The first we are to understand. The second we are to do.

Daniel **applies himself** to the greatest need of God's people at that moment in time. They needed to be a repentant people before God would take them back to their homeland. So Daniel aligned Himself with that which God was about to do.

seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

It is not hard at all to see what kind of prayers Daniel was praying.

Daniel knows the state of His own heart and the state of the hearts and lives of the Jewish people. They have had nearly 70 years to prepare for this moment, but they still were not ready. Daniel enters a state of severe repentance. He is committed to repenting. He is willing to put his money where his mouth was.

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Here is Daniel over 80 years old walking around in sackcloth and ashes. He is fasting. He doesn't care what anyone thinks.

4 I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments,

Many of God's promises are conditional promises. Sometimes in one place you may find a promise and **no conditions** are mentioned. But when you read the promise in another passage you find there **is** a condition. Sometimes He promises to do something unconditionally, no matter what anyone does. Sometimes He promises to do something IF or WHEN a person or group meets the conditions. Daniel knows what His God is like and he addresses God in worship. This is a great and awesome God. This is a covenant keeping God. This God has a steadfast love toward those who are His. But those who are His spiritually are those who love Him and keep His commandments. Those who are His eternally are an obedient people.

But there is a problem that Daniel is too keenly aware of.

5 we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules.

Notice how Daniel prays here. He says "WE". Man, when we read about Daniel we don't see any details of his **sin**. He looks like a super Christian, a stellar believer. He continually was willing to sacrifice his life for his God.

Think about that. Daniel **could** have said, "I have been faithful to God when few else were. I was willing to risk my life continually for God. I have special gifts that God gave me. No one is really quite like me, quite as singled out by God for His use as I am. And I have been doing this all my life.

I wish these other people would get on the ball. I wish they would follow my example. I wish they would straighten out."

Daniel could have responded that way. But he didn't. Because at the end of the day, God deserves to be loved with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. And Daniel, nor anyone else, has ever done it. **No one** ever lives up to that which God deserves. When dealing with God, our failures loom large. And His grace is like gold to us.

Have you ever felt superior to another believer? Have you ever wished they would get on the ball and be as faithful as you are? Have you ever despised their failures? I would guess that we all have, at times. Especially when someone is getting away with something we would like to get away with.

Well I think none of us could hold a candle to Daniel. And yet he identified most with his people's **failures**. He shared with them their absolute need for grace and mercy.

The honest prayer of every true believer mirrors the prayer of the tax collector that Jesus pointed out to His disciples when he prayed, **God forgive me THE sinner**. That is the point of reference with every believer. Our fellow believers

may sin differently than we do. Their sins may be more noticeable, more notorious. But we do not know how much **they** were given in comparison to how much **we** were given. And to whom **much** is given, **much** is required. We are not in a position to ever evaluate the degree of sin another is guilty of. We may be guilty of more by degree than we are. Paul saw himself as the **greatest** of sinners. That is the one place in his ministry where we would like to **argue** with him. No Paul. Look at what I know. Look at what I have been given. And look what I have done with it. I am surely worse than you Paul.

Daniel serves as a wonderful example of humility for us. He was just **one more** of the sinners he was identifying with.

But notice another thing. He is not just praying for himself. He takes on a Christ like quality here. He is including his **countrymen** in his prayer. He is, in a small sense, taking upon himself their sin and calling out to God for forgiveness of their sin. Naturally Daniel could not provide atonement for their sin. But he could appeal to God for that forgiveness. And that is what he did.

When we see a brother or sister in sin, do we pray with that attitude? Oh God, please rescue them from their sin. It is ruining their life. Please put them in the spot where they confess their sin so you will restore their fellowship with you.

Or do we pray, God, please make them stop sinning because it creates such a problem in my life? Do you see the difference. Daniel models both **how we should think** and **how we should pray**.

And what is it that Daniel is confessing?

In vs 5- we turned aside from your commandments and rules.

Here is confession that we knew what God said and we did the opposite. Sometimes from selfishness. Sometimes from rebellion. There are lots of motives, but at the end of the day we did not do what you said. But Daniel expands this confession in vs 6.

6 We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

Sometimes there are sins we did not know about. But that does not provide us an excuse. Sometimes we do not know because like Israel, we have not listened.

The prophets spoke, but we did not pay attention to what they said. We didn't seek out the sources of truth that were available to us. We were too busy following our hearts and doing what seemed best to us.

How many times have we chosen the wrong path, chosen the wrong response, trusted our own instincts and perceptions, because we simply would not choose

to read what God has said? Try to imagine how our excuses will hold up before God. It might go like this:

Me-“Lord, I did that wrong thing because I did not know it was wrong. I did not know the right thing to do.

Jesus- Why IS that Jon?

Me- Well I had never read it or heard it.

Jesus- Why not Jon? Did you not have access to a Bible or to people who you believed were wise seasoned Christians?

Me- Well, yeah I did have a Bible and I could have easily asked someone, but that research would have taken work and learning how to do it, and asking questions would have been awkward.

Jesus- So Jon, you preferred doing what was convenient and easy and that **you wanted to do** above doing the simple things you **could have done** to find out what would have pleased me?

Do you really expect **me** to accept the same excuses you **tell yourself**? Really Jon, what was my sacrifice **for** you worth **to** you? Would it not be worth a few minutes of awkwardness or study?

Me- Well when you put it that way Lord, please forgive me of this sin. I see now I have no excuse. I have not listened to your Word.”

Not listening to the prophet’s message was no excuse for Daniel’s generation, any more than it is for ours. God has spoken in His word. God has seen many of his best servants give their lives to keep that word in print. He has placed godly people in our lives. We should think carefully before we accept our own excuses for our sin.

We are going to stop here this morning.

Let’s review what we have seen.

Daniel **read God’s word to understand God’s will.**

Daniel understood what **God will** do and man **must do.**

Daniel devoted himself to repentance for both himself and for God’s people.

A possible application for us this week could be to look at how we view others.

Can we really identify with them in our common need for repentance? Do we see that we, all together, are equally needing of the grace of God? Do we pray for and desire God’s forgiveness **for ourselves** like we crave it **for others** as well? Do we truly think in our heart of hearts that we need grace **every bit as much** as every other Christian we know?

Are we willing to put ourselves in Daniel’s place and let our prayers represent both our own need, and our church’s need, and our world’s need for forgiveness?