

## Daniel 9 - How Do I Pray to Move the Heart of God?

**February 10, 2012**

Good morning! I am Pastor Kurt. I want to say a special “Hello” to those joining us through the Internet. We are studying the Old Testament book of Daniel. This morning, we are in Daniel 9. Take your Bibles and turn to Daniel 9. If you didn’t bring a Bible, in the seat pocket in front of you, there is a Bible. You will find Daniel 9 on page 746.

In our study of the book of Daniel, the theme of God’s sovereignty over all things strikes us in every chapter. God leaves nothing to chance. Nothing is out of his control. No matter how formidable the odds, God can always come to the rescue. He rescued Shadrach, Meshach and Abednago in the fiery furnace. He rescued Daniel in the lions’ den. Nothing can restrain God’s hand from accomplishing what he ordains.

This is good stuff. We need a healthy dose of God’s sovereignty. Our view of God is often too small. When we realize God also loves us more than anyone possibly could, that provides great encouragement in times of trouble. God loves us and nothing in our lives is out of his control.

While wrapping our minds around God’s sovereignty is good, it can lead to an unintentional side effect. We may become fatalistic. We begin to wonder if we should pray. After all, won’t God simply do what he already ordained? Why pray for a friend with cancer? Isn’t the outcome of his or her disease already ordained by God from the foundation of the world? If God is so big and sovereign, why would our feeble prayers make a difference?

When we come to Daniel 9, we find an answer to that question. Not only do we discover why we pray to a sovereign God, the text also answers another important question: “How should we pray to a sovereign God?” As we look at the text, we will break it down under those two questions.

### Why pray if God is sovereign?

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans— 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. Daniel 9:1–2 (ESV)

As we learned earlier in this series, these last six chapters of Daniel are not in chronological order. They are pulled together and gathered at the end of the book. This event took place in the first year of Darius. That is right after chapter 5, when Babylon was conquered by the Medes and the Persians, and right before chapter 6, when Daniel is thrown in the lions’ den.

As the chapter opens, Daniel is having a quiet time. He was having a little personal Bible study. He wasn’t in church. This was his own personal time in the Bible with God. This is something every one of us needs in our lives. While Daniel was reading, he ran across a passage where the light bulb went off. He read that the Babylonian captivity would last only 70 years. He does the math in his head and realizes they are 68 years into the captivity. God was about to end the exile. Most of us would be encouraged. At that point, we would sit back and relax. How does Daniel respond?

Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. Daniel 9:3 (ESV)

This is perplexing. If the captivity is sovereignly declared to last only 70 years, why does he begin praying as if the end of the captivity depended upon how intensely he prayed? He prayed with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. That is one intense prayer time.

To get an answer to this riddle, we need to look at Jeremiah. There are two portions of Jeremiah that talk about the captivity lasting just 70 years. Let's read them.

"Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the Lord, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. 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. This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Jeremiah 25:8–11 (ESV)

I find this amazing. Not only does the book of Daniel contain prophecy about the future, so does the book of Jeremiah. Through Jeremiah, God told the Jews they would be conquered by Babylon and exiled 70 years. Jeremiah wrote that before it happened.

"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 welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. 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. Jeremiah 29:10–14 (ESV)

At the end of 70 years, the release from captivity in Babylon would be in response to the prayer of God's people. While God sovereignly declares the

captivity will end after 70 years, from the people's perspective, they will be released from Babylonian captivity as God responds to the passionate prayers of his people. Prayer does matter. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are held together. Don't fall into the trap of believing God is sovereign so we shouldn't pray. Instead, we should remember that because God is sovereign, no matter the odds, he is fully capable of answering our prayers.

As we prepare to head to Spencer to open another campus, is the outcome of our efforts already sovereignly decreed by God? Yes! Do we need to pray and passionately seek the face of God asking him to make it possible? Yes!

There are prayer meetings held in the Spencer activity center 11:30 a.m.-12:20 p.m. on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month. I encourage you to join them. We know God will respond to the prayers of his people.

This is the antidote to fatalism. Fatalism means we don't seek God and ask him to heal those who are sick or provide for our needs because our prayers don't matter. The Bible says it is when we seek God that he responds to our needs. Since he is sovereign, we know he answers prayer.

### **How do we pray?**

Most of the chapter is a written copy of Daniel's prayer. Why is this prayer written down? I think it is given to us and the Jews in exiles as an example of how we should pray for a nation's spiritual restoration. It is a lengthy prayer. We

will not go through all of it. We will only look at a few of the key ingredients in the prayer to help instruct us on our praying.

## Confess

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, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. 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. To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. To us, O Lord, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Daniel 9:4–10 (ESV)

Daniel began by confessing his sins and the sins of the people.

Confession of sin is important. Many of us find it hard to say, “I am sorry. I was wrong. I sinned. Please forgive me.” We often don’t confess our sins to others, and we often don’t begin our prayer time by confessing our sins to God. The Bible teaches us to begin our prayers by acknowledging God and his character. It then tells us to acknowledge who we are and our character. This week, I want to encourage you to begin your prayer times by confessing sins. Daniel didn’t just confess personal sins, he also confessed corporate sins. He was guilty of corporate sin because he was part of the nation. Like Daniel, we are also bear some of the guilt for the sins of our nation. It is appropriate to confess our corporate guilt in prayer.

I also noticed the confession of his sins was specific. He listed his sins. He confessed the sin of not listening to the prophets. He confessed the sin of not obeying God's commandments. It is good to be specific about sin and specific about the character of God. He is faithful; we are faithless.

### **Acknowledge the rightness of God's discipline.**

All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him. He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity. For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem. As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth. Therefore the Lord has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us, for the Lord our God is righteous in all the works that he has done, and we have not obeyed his voice. Daniel 9:11–14 (ESV)

When we sin, we will suffer. The reason for the exile was the sin of God's people. Rather than seeking him, they followed the culture around them. God warned them that if they broke their covenant with him, they would suffer.

Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain, and the land will yield no fruit, and you will perish quickly off the good land that the Lord is giving you. Deuteronomy 11:16–17 (ESV)

Daniel acknowledged the Babylonian captivity was completely fair on God's part. It was God's discipline upon the Jews to break them from their sin. Their exile in Babylon was truly less than they deserved for their sins.

When we sin, we suffer. Our first reaction when suffering is to tell God his discipline is too harsh. It is unfair. That is the wrong attitude. We need to confess that the suffering God allows into our lives as a result of our sins is less

than fair. Until we admit God is righteous in all he does, including allowing us to face some of the consequences of our sins, we have not learned the lesson God is trying to teach. We think of ourselves as less sinful than we are and the consequences of our sins as less serious than they are.

What is unfair is not our suffering for our sins but Jesus, who never sinned, suffering for our sins. He died in our places, for our sins. He died so that we will not have to face the just consequences of eternal punishment for our sins. What we don't deserve is the mercy of God who sent his son to die for us.

**Acknowledge the stubbornness of my heart.**

As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth. Daniel 9:13 (ESV)

As I read this, I underlined it twice in my Bible. When God disciplines us, he intends the discipline to lead us to him. It should get us on our knees so we call out for mercy. Daniel admits that God's discipline left many of the Israelites hard-hearted toward God, not soft-hearted. They were stubborn. The Bible also calls this acting stiff-necked. This is similar to spanking a child that refuses to let his or her will be broken. Many of the Israelites were stubbornly refusing to learn their lessons.

Is that you this morning? Has God's discipline in your life left your hard-hearted toward him? It was intended to make you soft-hearted toward him.

**Ask for mercy for the sake of God's name, not my own.**

And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly... 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. Daniel 9:15,17 (ESV)

Daniel asked for mercy. I want us to notice why he asked for mercy. It was not for the Jews' sake. It was not to make their names famous. He asked for mercy so God's name would be famous through their lives. He wanted God's name to be made famous through what he did in their lives. He reasoned with God from history. He remembered how God made his name famous through their hard-hearted forefathers in the land of Egypt. These were the forefathers that rebelled in the wilderness so many times that God did not let them into the Promised Land. They walked in circles in the desert until they died off because God was so angry at their disobedience.

While God was angry at their disobedience, he still made his name famous through their lives. God's name was famous in the land of Egypt for generations after the 10 plagues. His name was famous for generations because of the Red Sea crossing, the walls of Jericho falling down, the conquests and victories in the foreign lands.

God didn't miraculously save them because they were more righteous than anybody else. He saved them to make his name famous, not their names.

What a great prayer for our lives. "God use my life to make your name famous, not my own. When it is all said and done, I want people to remember what you did through my life, not what I did in my life."

### **How did God respond to the prayer?**

How did God respond to this prayer? We will not study this in depth today. Let me briefly summarize how the chapter unfolds. Gabriel was dispatched from



heaven to give Daniel understanding about how the history of his people would unfold.

The 70 years of captivity were not the only time of exile for God's people. The final verses of this chapter deal with 70 weeks decreed for God's people. They are some of the most difficult verses to understand in the Bible. Let me briefly summarize them.

God's people would be released from Babylon. God's people would rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. There was coming a time when something would put an end to sin, atone for iniquity and bring in everlasting righteousness. My understanding is this dealt with the first coming of Christ.

Then the prophecy jumps to the events before the second coming of Christ. The ultimate little horn, the antichrist will arise. He will aid in restoring Israel, then he will turn on Israel and be the ultimate opposition of the people of God.

### **Applications**

1. **God is large and in charge of world history.** Just as God decreed 70 years of captivity for his people in Babylon, there are definite periods of time God has decreed for his people, including the coming of Christ, the rebuilding of the temple, the rejection of Christ by the people of God, the coming of the antichrist and Christ's return. None of it is speculative. It is all decreed by God.
2. **While God is sovereign over history, our prayers are the means by which God works within history.** Daniel 9 kept reminding me to pray. Pray

about all things. Pray for the progress of the church. Pray for our community and our nation. Church history teaches us that significant movements of God are always preceded by prayer by the people of God. Almost every revival and mission movement in history has its roots in the prayers of God's people.

3. **In prayer, focus on confessing sin and clinging to God's mercy through Jesus.** Too often, our prayers focus on what we want rather than recognizing who we are and who God is. In this week's small group meeting, focus your prayer time on who God is and specific confession of sins, both corporate and personal.
4. **Ask God for the fame of his name through my life, rather than the fame of my name.** This doesn't mean we should not let God know our wishes and desires. This is simply reminding us that we pray like Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane when it came to the cross. He said, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not my will but your will be done." In times of prayer, ask God to make his name famous through our lives. Acknowledge that he has the right to determine how he will accomplish that. It may be taking us out of exile in the land of Babylon. It may be allowing us to suffer. He is God. He has the right to determine those things. It is still good to tell him our wishes.



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