

# Daniel 9

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[0:00] To be seated and turn to Daniel chapter 9. Daniel chapter 9. I keep praying for Geth and Katie. And so she's still in labour. They watched the service this morning from the delivery room. So if you're watching. Go on.

There was a man called Martin Niemuller. He was one of the leaders in the German Confessing Church in Germany just before and during the Second World War. Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Niemuller were both, are both heroes of the Confessing Church. They stood up to Hitler. Bonhoeffer was murdered. Martyred. He died just a few weeks before the end of the war. Niemuller was imprisoned.

He was sent to a concentration camp in 1928. He was in Dachau until 1945 as Hitler's personal prisoner. He narrowly escaped execution and in his autobiography he describes those first few days in prison. He says they took my wallet, my wristwatch, my wedding ring, my pocket bible. That night I didn't sleep at all. I didn't find any peace.

I'd lost my memory through very strenuous weeks of interrogation. During the trial I couldn't remember a single verse of scripture. I was dependent on the written word, on the printed word but they'd taken away my bible.

If only I could have my bible, he said. And then amazingly the next day he pleaded with the guards to give him back his bible and they gave him his pocket bible.

[1:36] He writes in his diary, I've not been 12 hours in the concentration camp and the book has entered. The holy book, the book that bears witness and testifies to him to whom all power belongs in heaven and earth.

It was all I needed, me mother said. How do you cope if you're the personal prisoner of Adolf Hitler in a concentration camp? Very simply, you get your bible out and you pray.

How do you cope if you're an old man in exile in Babylon? You get your bible out and you pray. And that's what Daniel does. He's a long way from home.

He's been away from home most of his life. He is in exile in Babylon and so in chapter 9, the first three quarters of chapter 9 is Daniel's prayer. He's praying to God and then from verses 20 to the end is God's answer to the prayer.

Those are the two things tonight. First of all, Daniel praying and then God's remarkable answer to his prayer. Because God always answers, doesn't he? Daniel's prayer. If you look at the opening verses of chapter 9, it's about 539 BC.

[2:44] It's approximately 70 years after Daniel was taken as a young teenager away from home into exile. Chapter 1, he's about 14.

He's in his 80s, certainly in chapter 9. And we read there that in the first year of Darius, son of Xerxes, a mead by descent, who was made ruler over the king of the realm of the Chaldeans, in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived, I understood 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 this disaster in Jerusalem, namely 70 years.

It's interesting because Jeremiah, the prophet Jeremiah, who Daniel is reading, has only been dead for a couple of decades. And already, Daniel is able to refer to the book of Jeremiah as the word of God.

He refers to it as scripture. It's been written down. And he says, I understood now through the word of God given to Jeremiah. And he calls it scripture, verse 2. And the passage that he's reading to about is that really well-known passage, which you've probably had quoted to you from Jeremiah

29.

Jeremiah wrote to the exiles in Babylon. They're the fridge magnet verses. They are the Christian calendar verses. They are the verses that people put in cards. I've got a plan for you and a hope for you.

[4:06] Let me read the passage to you from Jeremiah 29. For thus says the Lord, when 70 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. And then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me. You'll seek me with all your heart. And 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 which I have driven you, declares the Lord.

And I'll bring you back. I'll bring you back out of exile. And Daniel read that in his Bible. And he found those words in his Bible. And he says, verse 3. Then I turned to the Lord God.

It's the first thing I want you to notice about Daniel's praying and Daniel's prayer. It's that his prayer is rooted in the Word of God. It's prayer that arises out of the Scriptures.

[5:07] And yet it's interesting that when you read that passage from Jeremiah and that promise that God makes, that after 70 years are up, that he says, I'll end your captivity.

I'll bring you back into Jerusalem. When you read those words and then Daniel looks around at his world, there's a massive discrepancy, isn't there? There's a discrepancy.

There is a tension between what Daniel reads in his Bible and what is happening in the world around him. What he's experiencing in his life.

The 70 years are almost up. But there's no real sign at all of God's people returning to Jerusalem. In fact, tragically, most of them don't want to go back.

Most of them have been born in exile. They've made a pretty good life for themselves. They are far away from God and yet they've got no intention of going back to Jerusalem to pick up things where they left off.

[6:06] And despite what the Bible says, God's people, after all this time, are still in captivity. There's no immediate or remote possibility prospect of them going home.

It's that tension between what is in the word and what is in the world that prayer is born.

Well, I think that's one of the reasons why we find it so difficult. To pray either corporately as a church or individually as Christians. And it's one of the reasons why my prayer life is so weak. Because we don't spend enough time either in the word or in the world. There are some Christians who spend all their time in the word and they never set foot in the real world.

So there's no tension there. They're out of touch. They're unfeeling with the burdens that people carry. They don't realize the things that are happening under their noses.

[7:05] And then there are those who live in the world and are really never in the word. So there's no tension either there. Because when you live in the word and in the world, it creates a tension.

The word tells us that the gospel is the power of God to salvation for all who believe. The word tells us that the gospel is good news. It's a powerful message from God.

Which is intended to save people from any and every and all kinds of backgrounds. It is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. That's what the word says.

But when you travel around the UK, you don't hear of many conversions, do you? There are not many people in the UK coming to faith in Jesus Christ. There's that discrepancy, isn't there, between what the word says and what is happening in the world.

Doesn't the Bible say that God's word will never return to him void? It will always accomplish his purpose. And yet I know men who've been in the ministry preaching for decades and they've hardly seen anything happen.

[8:12] Doesn't the word of God say that God does not desire the death of the wicked? Doesn't the Bible tell us that God desires all people to repent and come to a knowledge of the truth? But the people I meet are blasé about their spiritual state.

They drift along without a thought to where they're going. Doesn't the Bible say to you and I who've trusted in him, in Christ, Greater is he that is in you, that is the Holy Spirit, who is in you than who is in the world.

And yet the spirit of the world seems to win over in my life over and over again. Now what do you do when there's that discrepancy, when there's that tension between what you read in your Bible and what you read in your newspaper?

Well you can do one or two things. You can shrug your shoulders and walk away or you can bend your knees and pray. And that's what Daniel did. So I turned to the Lord God and I pleaded with him.

In prayer and petition and fasting and in sackcloth and ashes. Do you remember checkbooks? Do you remember checkbooks? So children, you get checks from your grandparents for their birthday. [9:26] They are a pain in the neck to try and pay in. Alright? But what a checkbook is, isn't it, is on the check it says like this, isn't it? It says your name and it says pay bearer, Ethan Little, on demand.

You go to the bank, you pay in the bank, they put the money into your bank. That's how Daniel prays. He goes to God. And he pleads with God and he says, God you said and this is not happening.

I do remember how Jesus taught us to pray in that prayer for the disciples. Your will be done. Your kingdom come.

Your name to be hallowed on earth as it is in heaven. But it's not like that, is it? It's not like that in my street. It's not like that in your family circle maybe.

It's not like that in your workplace. Certainly not like that in our city. And so we come to God and we plead with him, his promises. Look how it's put here in verse 3.

[10:27] Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting. Fasting. And sackcloth and ashes.

Fasting is really disciplining yourself, isn't it? We have a day of fasting at the start of the year. It's a good thing. Fasting is teaching yourself a lesson. Fasting is giving up anything that gets in the way of being serious about praying.

So ordinarily it's food in the Bible, but it may well be the internet. It might well be your phone. It may well be a night in front of the telly. And we need to get together to pray because nothing much is happening, but God has said things will happen.

So we pray and we plead with God and we plead his promise. But we might say, well yes, but Wednesday night is my night for dot, dot, dot. It's Champions League on prayer meeting night. And so here's the challenge. The challenge is if we really see the tension between what God has said in his word, and what is happening in the world, it will mean we pray. That we'll be serious as a church to pray together and to plead with God.

[11:39] But it will mean we're serious as individuals, as couples, as families that will pray. Can I make a practical suggestion to you? Sometimes people don't know what to pray about.

Can I say, make the headlines your prayer points. It was heartbreaking, wasn't it, this week. I found it very, very difficult to read about what that nurse did.

And it was easy to just stop reading, to kind of do anything but think about what happened in those hospitals to those children. I struggled to pray about it, but I should have.

And if you read the BBC or the Ealing Gazette, is Ealing Gazette still going? You get an email, don't you, that none of us read from Ealing each week. But you use the headlines. And if you're a real believer, it should grieve you.

If the spirit of Jesus is in you, it should break your heart. And so why not take those headlines and make them prayer points? And say, this isn't what you meant it to be like, Lord.

[12:43] You didn't create people to go through this. You made men and women and boys and girls in your image and in your likeness. And things are broken and things are fallen. Things are screwed up, Lord.

And you start pleading with him. And that's where prayer is born. It is born in that tension. And so Daniel's praying. It's rooted in the Bible. It's rooted in the Word of God.

And it rests in the character of God. That's the second thing. I don't know if this has happened to you, but you go to pick someone up, maybe at the railway station or at the airport.

And they're late. And everyone's come off the plane or they're off the train. And you're the only one there standing like a lemon at the platform.

Try to ring them. You can't get hold of them. And you're very irritated. You're very annoyed. You think of all the money you're clocking up on the airport car park. Don't they realise how important Paul Levy is and how valuable my time is?

[13:41] And you get annoyed, don't you? But then you reach a certain stage where your annoyance turns to worry. And you start to worry about the person because you say it's not like so-and-so to be late.

They said they'd be here. Why isn't she texted? Why isn't she phoned? There must be something wrong. And so your focus moves from your own personal irritation and grievance and so on. And it moves from your being annoyed to the person that you're waiting for. And something like that happens in Daniel's prayer. Look at verse 4. I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession saying, O Lord, the great God and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments.

The reason he's praying is because God has said in 70 years I'm going to turn the exile and you will return to Jerusalem. But he doesn't mention the 70 years now. The 70 years are up.

But Daniel doesn't mention the 70 years. In his prayer he's taken up more with the character of God and the reputation of God. Because this is not some casual acquaintance.

[14:45] Some unreliable flaky millennial who may show up or may not show up. This is the covenant God of Israel. This is the great and awesome God. Who keeps his covenant with those who love him and obey his commandments.

Lord, you said you'd be here for us. What's happened? What is wrong? And of course the answer is there in verse 5 and 6, isn't it? We have sinned. We have done wrong. We have been wicked. We've rebelled.

We've turned away. We've not listened. You see the problem is not with God. It's with us. We don't see things through God's eyes. We don't see things the way God does.

John White. He was really popular when I was kind of growing up his books. But he's not very popular now. Well he's dead but his books are still around. In one of his books he gives his own personal experience of being a missionary in Bolivia.

He says, I watched the birth of our first child. And if you ask me how I felt, I'm sure I wrote a cell. I'm feeling great. But as I look back, I know that I was extremely frightened. Scott was born with badly clubbed feet.

[15:50] As he was lifted from the delivery table, my wife cried. John, look at his feet. There's something wrong with his feet, said my wife. I looked but I saw nothing wrong with his feet.

They're fine. But his feet, look at his feet. I looked. It's okay dear. His feet were just fine. Such was my anxious need to feel that all was well.

That I was blind to his distorted limbs. Incredible as it may seem. For I am a doctor. I was trained to inspect babies as they were born. I saw no grotesquely twisted limbs. Only straight ones.

I didn't know it at the time. But my fears made me blind to the reality that my son was born a cripple. I couldn't see what was under my nose. And then he goes on to say this.

Were the full impact of the fate of people around us to break over our minds, we might be too overwhelmed to pray at all. Some of us are blind to their fate in the same way and for the same reasons that I was blind to my son's legs.

[16:49] We are emotionally incapable of seeing the judgment that awaits us. Either we deny the reality or else we shield ourselves from its full impact. Acknowledging the fact but isolating ourselves from its horror.

And then he says no urgency grips us as we pray. And so you see when Daniel prays, he prays with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. And when Daniel prays, he doesn't come with a shopping list of his own needs.

His concern is the reputation of God. If people are far away from God doing their own thing, it is an insult to the glory and majesty of God. And that is what he's concerned about, the majesty and the glory of God.

And at the same time, he doesn't pray in a kind of standoffish, finger-pointing, petition-signing sort of way. You know the way I can sometimes be, isn't it?

So judgmental, so pharisaical, so holier than thou. That's not the way Daniel prays. He identifies himself, doesn't he? He says we have sinned. We have done wrong.

[17:51] We have rebelled. We have not listened. We're all in the same boat. Someone has described intercessory prayer as love on its knees with tears in its eyes.

Love on its knees with tears in its eyes. And that's the way to pray, isn't it? That's how Daniel prays for his people. That's the way we pray for our friends in school.

That's the way we are able to pray for healing. Love on its knees with tears in its eyes. No finger-pointing. No writing to your newspaper complaining on Facebook. But on your knees with tears in your eyes.

Lord, we've done this. We've turned our back on you. We're in exile. We're far from you. But you have promised. You said, Lord, will you not turn your face again towards us?

So secondly, how does God answer Daniel's prayer? It's very interesting, isn't it? Look at verses 20 to 23. It's a very interesting answer.

[19:19] Gabriel turns up to give Daniel insight and understanding, which is ironic. Because what follows in verses 24 to verse 27 are some of the most confusing verses in all the Bible.

It's all at sixes and sevens. And you might thought, what is all this about? And Daniel says, God sent Gabriel to give me insight and understanding.

And so the first thing he's given is an immediate assurance that his prayer has been heard. He says, while I was still speaking and praying, confessing, Gabriel comes and assures him that his prayers have been heard.

And that God is going to answer his prayers. But what is God's answer? Verse 24. It's a wonderful answer. 70 weeks or 77s. In other words, God is showing the real answer to Daniel's prayer.

It's not so much in the immediate future, but in the distant horizon. 70 times 7. Yes, the 70 years are almost up. And God is going to do what he said he was going to do.

[20:18] But there's something beyond the 70 years. There's something greater than the 70 years. There's 70 times 7. Let me illustrate it in this way. There's a film called The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill and Came Down a Mountain.

Hugh Grant is in the story playing the same role he plays in every film. But it's based on a true story. It's based actually on the village of Gwyla de Garth, which is just outside Pondipri, Tonguinlice.

They're doing ordnance survey maps just after the war. And so they sent a surveyor to look at all these towns and villages. And they sent one to Gwyla de Garth, outside Tonguinlice. The Egyptians have got their pyramids.

And the Greeks have got their temples. The Welsh have got mountains. And Gwyla de Garth, that village, is very, very proud of the mountain. And so the ordnance survey guy comes around and he discovers that it's not a mountain at all.

It's a hill. Wasn't high enough to be a mountain. Shouldn't be classified as a mountain. It's a hill. And so that really put the cat amongst the pigeons with the villagers.

[21:21] They get together. There's no way they could suffer that indignity of Gwyla de Garth not having a mountain. So they get together and this is going to ruin the film. They wheel their barrows up the hill.

And they add to the height of the hill. So it actually becomes a mountain. It could only happen in Wales. And in verse 20, Daniel is a man who went up a hill.

He's concerned about what he's focusing on. He goes up a hill, but he's praying about a mountain. It's the temple mountain in Jerusalem. Where the temple is built and where the animal sacrifices are offered.

Where the priests come and go. That's what he's concerned about. That's what he is concerned about. God's holy hill. But as he prays, God pulls back the walls and broadens his horizon.

And shows him that the hill is going to become a mountain. And God is going to actually do something in Jerusalem beyond anything that he could ever imagine. You see, Jerusalem was only ever a boyhood memory for Daniel.

[22:25] He was in his early teens when he left. But he'd never forgotten it. So do you remember, we looked at it. I can't remember which days blended or one, don't they? But when Daniel went and prayed.

And he opened his window three times a day. And he prayed towards Jerusalem. It was always on his mind. Always on his heart. It's very interesting that Daniel says that Gabriel turned up. I can see at the end of verse 21. At the time of evening sacrifice. There hasn't been an evening sacrifice for 70 years. The temple has been destroyed.

The priests have been dismissed. The sacrifices have been continued. And yet, as far as Daniel is concerned. His watch was always set to Jerusalem time. You know when you go on holiday, you're only away for a couple of days.

Maybe you're on a business trip. And so you keep your watch at British time, don't you? And so you say, what is the time in England? You look at your watch. And Daniel's watch was always set on Jerusalem time.

[23:26] On God's city time. That's what he's concerned about. That's what he is praying about. And as he prays that, he pleads with God to end the exile.

To bring the people back to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple. And God broadens his horizons. 70 times 7. From now he sees that hill will become a mountain. And on that mountain there is a cross.

And from that cross he hears a cry. It is finished. And God, you see, is going to do something momentous. Far reaching in Jerusalem. Verse 24. What is he going to do? He's going to make an end to sin.

It's a glorious verse. He's going to bring an everlasting righteousness. He's going to atone for wickedness. He's going to seal up this vision and prophecy. And anoint the most holy. It's monumentally significant.

And then what he does, and I think this is the only way I can put it. What he sort of shows Daniel, the real answers to his prayer, lies in the distant future. 70 times 7 from now. And then he hands him a pair of binoculars in verses 25 to 27.

[24:26] So you can get a close up view of what is going on. It's a little bit controversial. I'm not sure I've understood all the details. But don't get bogged down in the arithmetic.

When it comes to figures, I'm easily confused. I expect you are too. But don't get bogged down in arithmetic. This is theology, not maths. So do you remember when Peter asked Jesus, How many times do you think that I should forgive?

Should I forgive my brother seven times? And you can almost see him patting himself on the back. What a good boy am I. I'm putting up with this rat bag for years. How long do I have to keep putting up with him?

Seven times? Jesus says no, 70 times 7. What does he mean? 490 times? 491? No more forgiveness. Of course he doesn't mean that. Jesus means this.

You go on forgiving your brother. You keep on forgiving him. Continuously. You never give up. That's what Jesus means. 70 times 7. It's theology. Not arithmetic.

[25:34] And so when God says to Daniel that in the not too distant future, what he's saying is the 7 times 7, that there will be an immediate answer to your prayer, Daniel. In fact, we know that happened, don't we?

They were brought back from exile. Jerusalem was rebuilt. The temple restored. But it was never as good as the old temple. Some of the people returned. When sacrifice was introduced again, the priests, there was an answer to prayer.

But in the more distant future, in 62 7s, after the 7 times 7s, way off into the future. Do you see what it says? It says, the anointed one shall come.

The Christ. That means the Christ will come. And in that final week, the 70th week, 70 times 7, in other words, in God's perfect timing, in the fullness of time, as Paul says in Galatians, the anointed one will be cut off.

It's the language of a violent death, cut off, not for himself. It's the language of the suffering servant from Isaiah 53. Where he's cut off from the land of the living for the transgression of my people.

[26:34] Because you know why Jesus died? Jesus died not because it was an accident of history. Not some awful tragedy. Not something that got out of control. It was a deliberate. And he died voluntarily in your place.

And he took your sin upon his shoulders for your transgression. And he became the cursed thing. That's what it means when it talks about the abomination of desolation. We can barely comprehend it, can we?

When he says, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? It's the most abominable thing that's ever happened. Or will ever happen in this world. That we sinners took God's Son and nailed him to the cross.

And he became sin for us. And he turned his face away. He was made sin for us. Him who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God.

And do you see what God has done in Christ? He's made an end of sin. And all the blood and bulls and goats offered on the temple mountain. None could ever do that. It could only point to that one who will make an end of sin.

[27:39] And Jesus has brought eternal righteousness. And if you trust in Jesus as your sin bearer and your substitute. As the one who died in your place. Then you never need to wonder, am I right with God or not?

Because you are. And you don't have to go through life wondering, does he love me, does he not? Does he love me, does he not? If you trust in Jesus as your sin bearer, that he's taken what belongs to you.

He's taken your sin and what belongs to him. That perfect, lovely, winsome life of his is now given to you and put to your account. And you are endlessly, ultimately righteous.

As far as God is concerned. And so you don't have to go to a special seminar on prophecy. And you don't need to get a chart out to understand the end of Daniel 9. Because he's made an end of vision and prophecy.

It's all torn up now. It's fulfilled in him. The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom when he died. And all the lines of prophecy converge at the cross.

[28:45] And do you see what God's answer to Daniel's prayer is? God's answer to Daniel's prayer is Jesus. As the whole Bible is about him. And if you've not met Jesus in the scriptures, you've not understood the scriptures.

How can God turn away the captivity of his people when people wander off and follow other gods? When you and I get yourselves into a mess and our lives get messed up.

Because instead of worshipping the true and the living God, we've made idols and we've bowed down to and worshipped others. And we've been taken into some form of captivity. And there are all sorts of captivities in this room tonight, aren't there?

There are respectable and unrespectable ones. And when people get into that sort of mess, how can our lives be turned around? How can God turn again the captivity of his people?

How can this God who is so holy and righteous and just and good be reconciled to fickle, unfaithful people who keep letting him down and disgracing his name? How can God keep covenant with covenant breakers?

[29:50] One of the problems of preaching Daniel, isn't it? My fear is, for the young people this week, is they've made promises they can't keep. Like I have. Whether they're marriage vows, they've made them this week, or baptismal vows.

But we make promises, don't we, when we hear calls to stand for Christ. And I, like you, am a covenant breaker. How can the covenant keeping God keep covenant with covenant breakers? And the answer is this.

It is only through the cross of the Lord Jesus. And we have to keep coming back to that. We have to keep coming back to that. Let's pray together.

Amen.