

Daniel 9:1-27

The Promise of Messiah

This chapter contains one of the most moving and heart-felt prayers in the Bible, and one of the most important prophecies of the coming of Messiah.

Daniel 9:1-2 - "In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; In the first year of his reign, I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem."

Historical Side Note: This was not the same Ahasuerus mentioned in Esther. That Ahasuerus was the Hebrew name for Xerxes the Great. A misinterpretation of the Hebrew led to the misidentification of Ahasuerus as Artaxerxes in the Septuagint, Josephus and the Midrash. As we said before, Darius was probably a title given to a Mede leader named Gubaru who was named as a sort of co-regent over Babylon ruling along with Cyrus, the Persian king. Josephus said he was the son of Astyages, the last king of the Median kingdom. He was dethroned by the Persian king Cyrus the Great, but his son Gubaru/Darius became allied with Cyrus.

Cyrus as God's 'Shepherd'

Daniel had been studying the prophecies of Jeremiah and meditating on the causes of the Jewish exile and the destruction of Jerusalem.

He knew that the period of exile - 70 years according to Jeremiah - was about to end in about three or four years.

- **Jeremiah 29:10** - "For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place."

He also could have found in **Isaiah 44-45** a remarkable mention of God using a ruler named Cyrus. A man named Cyrus was now co-ruler with Darius as sovereign over the Medo-Persian empire.

- **Isaiah 44:28-45:4** - "That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid. Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I

have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me."

Isaiah had been shown the rise of Cyrus. Indeed, Cyrus had diverted the Euphrates River during the siege as prophesied. Belshazzar was terrified: "the joints of his loins were loosed" by the attack (**Daniel 5:5-6**). Babylon's "two-leaved" double gates had not been shut, which is how the Persians entered the city, according to Herodotus.

It seemed to Daniel that the end of the Jewish exile and the return and rebuilding of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem only lacked the prophesied command of Cyrus to begin.

Daniel's Prayer of Confession

But there was still the matter of Israel's idolatry and rebellion. Were the Jews as a people sufficiently repentant over the sins that had provoked God to exile them? And without Temple sacrifices of the sin and trespass offerings, how could their sins be atoned for?

This led to a prayer by Daniel confessing his own and Israel's sins and a plea for God's forgiveness and mercy.

The Ashamnu prayer ("We have trespassed"), the official Yom Kippur liturgy, is largely based on the phraseology found here in Daniel 9.

Daniel 9:3 - "And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:"

"supplications" - As we've said before, supplication conveys the sense that - like Daniel's three companions - you accept however God wants to answer your request. It means 'Thy will, not mine' be done. Daniel combines this attitude with the fervor and zeal of Jacob wrestling with God, unwilling to quit until he obtains the blessing.

These seem contradictory, but they are essential.

"fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes" - this is a traditional expression of humility. In effect you are presenting yourself as a sacrifice or burnt offering. The sackcloth is made of animal hair, and the ashes mean you see yourself as burnt up and consumed.

In the New Testament, this spiritual attitude becomes a constant:

- **Romans 12:1** - "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Daniel's Confession

Notice that there is no self-justification in this prayer.

Daniel could have tried to blame extenuating circumstances, or claim that the people were drawn away from obedience by force, or by the oppression of a series of bad kings, or seduced by irresistible foreign religious influences, or powerful demonic forces, or maybe ignorance of the Torah because of inadequate teachers. He might even have pointed an accusing finger at God's adversary, the accuser - "The Devil made me do it."

But there are no excuses here.

Daniel 9:4 - "And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments;

5 "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments:

6 "Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

7 "O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee.

8 "O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee.

9 "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him;

10 "Neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

11 "Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him.

12 "And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem.

13 "As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth.

14 "Therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice.

15 "And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly."

Although Daniel was faithful and "greatly beloved" by God (**Daniel 9:23**), he says "WE have sinned against Thee." He placed himself among all Israel who were being corporately chastised by the exile.

Like Paul: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." (**1 Timothy 1:15**)

The closer we get to God, the more sin, evil, weaknesses and shortcomings we find when we look at ourselves.

In fact, "Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law" - The good folks and the bad, upright citizens and criminals, kings and beggars. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (**Romans 3:23**)

"confusion of face" - or shame - belongs to us because not only did we commit spiritual adultery with foreign gods, but we PAID our lovers rather than receiving pay as a normal prostitute would. (**Ezekiel 16:33**)

"As it is written in the Law of Moses" - Jerusalem's destruction and the exile that followed confirmed what Moses had foretold, that they would be cursed in every aspect of life if they disobeyed God (See **Leviticus 26** and **Deuteronomy 28**)

"yet we have not made our prayer before the LORD our God" - Even in the midst of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile, their response was to complain rather than repent.

To Restore Jerusalem

Daniel 9:16 - "O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us.

17 "Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake.

18 "O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies.

19 "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name."

Not "for our righteousneses, but for thy great mercies." - Daniel knew his requests could not be answered based on his own righteous deeds, but only because of God's mercy.

This what it means to pray "in the name of Jesus." We approach God from the position of being "in Christ." believing He can do all things but desiring His will, not ours, to prevail. God looks at us and sees His righteous Son.

Gabriel and an Answer to Daniel's Prayer

The only way God's people could be completely reconciled with God was with the sacrifice of His Son who would take their sin - and all sins - upon Himself as well as God's justice/punishment for sin.

So God's answer to Daniel's prayer was to give him a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah, who would "make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity."

Daniel 9:21-23 - "Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision."

Gabriel = *gabrî'ēl* - from *gever*, meaning "man", and *'Ēl*, meaning "God"; "warrior of God" or "Man of God" or "strength of God". Alongside the archangel Michael, Gabriel is described as the guardian angel of the Israelites.

Gabriel later appears to Zechariah foretelling the birth of John the Baptist. Then he appears to Mary, to announce that she would conceive and bear a son Jesus.

The Prophecy of Seventy Weeks

Daniel 9:24 - "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy."

The chapter begins with Daniel pondering Jeremiah's prophecy that the exile would last 70 years. Now Daniel receives a prediction looking further into the future.

weeks = *shavu'im* - not the usual feminine form translated week, but masculine, and is

best rendered heptad or seven units or periods of time. Used in **Genesis 29:27** where Laban tells Jacob, "Finish this week's (*shavu'im* masculine) celebration, and we will give you the younger one in return for another seven (*shavuim* feminine) years of work."

70 X 7 = 490 years in all.

But where this period begins and ends has been argued over by scholars for centuries, which we will discuss later.

There is an element of the Jubilee Year in the total of 490 years.

Seven is a number representing completion. Israel was told to rest the land every seven years. After seven sabbatical years would come a 50th year, the Jubilee year, marked by releasing people from their debts, releasing all slaves, and returning property to its original owners (**Leviticus 25:1-13**).

The wording of this prophecy is more vague and indeterminate than the previous vision pointing to coming kingdoms and the persecution by Antiochus. The Jerusalem Bible notes describe these verses as "allusive and enigmatic... and obscure."

The rabbis were unable to correlate a victorious Messiah with a Messiah who is cut off and killed as described here. So they invented a Messiah ben Joseph who would battle the enemies of God and die in battle, followed by Messiah ben David, who would bring in the kingdom of God.

Traditional Christianity has seen these verses as a prophecy of Jesus as the Messiah being cut off and crucified on the cross followed by the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

Six purposes are said to be working out through this timeline:

- **"to finish the transgression"** - finish = *kālā'* - restrict, hold back, prohibit

transgression = *peša'* - from a root that means rebellion, trespass, sin

- **"to make an end of sins"** - "make an end" = *tāmam* - be finished, completed (although some manuscripts have "seal up" here = *ḥātam* - to seal up, as in "reserve for judgment")

sins = *ḥaṭṭā'āt* - sin, sin offering, the penalty for sin

- **"to make reconciliation for iniquity"** - to make reconciliation for = *kāpar* - to cover over, atone, purge, reconcile; the Ark was "pitched within and without with pitch" [see **Genesis 6:14**] (pitch = *kephar* = "atonement, covering," where we get Yom Kippur)

iniquity = *āvôn* - perversity, twisted, wickedness

- **"to bring in everlasting righteousness"** - to bring in = *bô'* - come in, bring, lead in

everlasting = *ôlām* - outside of time, the vanishing point, eternity, hidden time

righteousness = *şedeq* - justice, rightness, righteousness

Jesus specifically said his baptism was needful: "...for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. " (**Matthew 3:15**)

- **"and to seal up the vision and prophecy"** - seal up = *ḥātam* - seal up, affix a seal, keep securely, (so nothing can be added or deleted, changed or corrupted), attesting the true authorship, fulfill

the vision = *ḥāzôn* - a vision, dream, revelation or oracle

prophecy = *nāḇī'* - prophecy

- **"and to anoint the most holy"** - anoint = *māšah* - to smear or anoint with a liquid, or oil; to consecrate

the most holy = *qōdeš* - holy, sanctuary, hallowed thing, consecrated place or thing, sacred, set apart

Gabriel Refines the Focus of the 70 weeks

Daniel 9:25 - "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times."

There were several decrees regarding the Jews returning to Jerusalem: Cyrus' decree in 538 B.C., Artaxerxes 1's decree to Ezra in 458 B.C. and another of his to Nehemiah in 444 B.C.

The decree of 458 B.C. included the rebuilding of the walls and streets as mentioned, and continued against resistance from the Samaritans in "troublous times."

"seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks" (weeks of years) would total 483 years.

So, from the going forth of the decree in 458 B.C. to Jesus' baptism, circa A.D. 26 is 483 years. But there is still one week - the 70th - to come. This is the time from Jesus baptism to 3 1/2 years after the crucifixion, which happens "in the midst of" that week.

Messiah Cut Off

Daniel 9:26 - "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.

"And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate."

The first heptad or period of seven weeks of years (49 years) lasts from the decree to around 409 B.C. with the reforms of Nehemiah and the completion of the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

From that point, "after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off."

After Jesus' baptism. Jesus' ministry lasted for 3 1/2 years, half of a week of years. He was crucified in the midst of the week, a week (seven years) that ended at the stoning of Stephen and the calling of Paul.

"the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary" - Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman general Titus in 70 A.D.

"the end thereof shall be with a flood" - some see this meaning "his end" referring to "The prince" who destroys the city, but Titus lived for 10 more years. It more probably refers to "the city and the sanctuary" which were destroyed suddenly and completely after the siege.

"he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week"- or "cause the covenant to prevail..." Jesus through his ministry offered Himself as Messiah to the Jewish people and nation, which continued after his crucifixion (3,000 were saved at Pentecost) until the stoning of Stephan and the new believers were forced out of Jerusalem. This also coincided with Paul's career, who held the cloaks of those who did the stoning. Paul's conversion is dated to 33/34 A.D.

- **Acts 2:38-39** - "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

"in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease" - fulfilled at Jesus' crucifixion. The Temple veil was rent and the sacrificial system was rendered as finished and the Law fulfilled.

- **John 19:30** - "It is finished."

- **Hebrews 9:11-12** - "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

"and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate" - overspreading is *kānāp* again, meaning to cover over, atone, purge, reconcile. "purging" seems to fit. But the word can also mean "wing" or pinnacle of the Temple or "the hem of his garment"

In that case, God is the one who devastates the Temple and the city, because of the abomination of the the nation rejecting their Messiah.

But *kānāp* also means the flap or quarter of a garment and was used to designate part of the "battlements" of the Temple.

The Jerusalem Bible translates this as:

"On the wing *kānāp* (of the Temple) will be the disastrous abomination, until the end, until the doom assigned to the devastator."

"Abomination" is widely used in scripture to refer to an idol. Antiochus set up a statue of Zeus in the Temple. Emperor Caligula tried to get a statue of himself placed in the Temple. After the city's destruction, the ensigns of the Roman army, which carried the images of their gods or emperors, were set up in the holy place. Emperor Hadrian later built a temple to Jupiter on the Temple Mount around 130-135 CE, causing major Jewish revolts. Spiritually, the Antichrist sets us himself as an abomination in our Temple. All these could be foreseen here.

So an alternative understanding would be that all of **Daniel 9:27** concerns the destruction of Jerusalem. The Roman prince Titus confirms covenants and treaties with many - particularly the Medes, Parthians, and Armenians - as they put down the Jewish rebellion. The Romans caused the Temple sacrifices to cease halfway through the siege, mentioned by Josephus.

But then it's not clear when the 70th week begins and ends.

Other interpretations abound.

An Eschatological Delay

Some interpret Gabriel's timeline as a rebuke to the unrepentant Jewish exiles.

One component of ending the exile was Israel's repentance. God promised that when Israel returns to Him with all their heart and with all their soul (**Deuteronomy 30:2**), He would then initiate the restoration (**Deuteronomy 30:3–10**), complete with all the glories of what would later be known as the new covenant (**Deuteronomy 30:6**).

Because of their recalcitrance, Gabriel is saying that the exile would be extended by seven times. i.e. seven x Jeremiah's predicted 70 years or 490 years. The coming of the Messiah would mark the true completion of their exile.

- **Leviticus 26:18** - "And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins."

But the people did not repent, despite the sincerity of Daniel's prayer, as well as those of Ezra (**Ezra 9**) and Nehemiah (**Nehemiah 1**).

For this reason, the rabbis considered the exile not to have ended, even when they were back in the Promised Land. The Messiah would cause them to repent and bring in the kingdom.

New Testament References

Jesus mentions this verse in Daniel, but His words are also obscure.

- **Matthew 24:15-16** - "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains..."

Eusebius and Epiphanius of Salamis cite a tradition that before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 the Jerusalem Christians had been miraculously warned to flee to Pella, in the region of the Decapolis across the Jordan River.

"The people of the Church in Jerusalem were commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city who were worthy of it to depart and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella. To it those who believed on Christ traveled from Jerusalem, so that when holy men had altogether deserted the royal capital of the Jews and the whole land of Judaea..." — *Eusebius, Church History 3, 5, 3*

But Jesus' warning concerns something that precedes the destruction of Jerusalem, allowing believers time to flee.

Luke's version of Jesus' warning does not mention the "abomination," but says "compassed by armies" as its equivalent:

- **Luke 21:20** - "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh."

- **Mark 13:14-23** adds, "...standing where it ought not.."

The whole city of Jerusalem was considered holy, not just the Temple. But so was the Promised Land itself. The inexorable march of Roman legions toward Jerusalem with their idols on their banners could be the "overspreading abomination" polluting the holy place of the Promised Land.

Josephus notes one more possibility. He considered the irreligious nature of the zealots leading the revolt as polluting the sanctuary:

"These men therefore trampled upon all the laws of men; and laughed at the laws of God: and for the oracles of the prophets they ridiculed them, as the tricks of jugglers. Yet did these prophets foretell many things concerning [the rewards of] virtue, and [punishments of] vice, which when these zealots violated, they occasioned the fulfilling of those very prophecies belonging to their own country. For there was a certain ancient oracle of those men, that 'The city should then be taken, and the sanctuary burnt, by right of war, when a sedition should invade the Jews: and their own hands should pollute the temple of God.' Now while these zealots did not [quite] disbelieve these predictions, they made themselves the instruments of their accomplishment." - *Josephus, Wars of the Jews, 1v.6.3.*

The source of the prophecy he mentions is not known.

Bottom Line: At the very least, we know that this chapter was received by the Jews as well as the Church as a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah. And the Jews of Jesus' day knew that this timeline was almost completed, which caused great anticipation.

See 'How early Judaism read Daniel 9:24-27'
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