

Prayer that moves Heaven and Earth

Daniel 9:20-27

What is the purpose of prayer? In addition to cultivating communion with God, God also gives us the privilege of working with Him in the world through prayer. In 1 Corinthians 3:9, the Apostle Paul wrote, “*For we are God’s fellow workers* or as the King James version puts it, “*we are laborers together with God.*” In other words, we work together with God and other supernatural beings in the spiritual realm in the administration of the universe.

Last week I shared that some Christians, who understand that God is sovereign, struggle to pray. They question: “If God already knows my needs before I ask, and if He’s going to do what He’s going to do, then why do I need to pray, much less persist in prayer.”

Our prayers matter precisely because God is sovereign and He has decreed that He operates in the world in response to the prayers of His people.

To illustrate the privilege God has given to His people to work with Him in the administration of the universe, Adrian Rogers shared, “I don’t know how to fly an airplane, but there have been times when I’ve been up with a pilot and he would say to me, “Do you want to fly this airplane? I said, “Sure.” So, he turns the airplane over to me. He’s sitting there alongside of me, of course, and he’s got his hands on his controls. And I have my hands on the other controls and I’m flying the airplane. Now folks, I want to make it very clear, he could do it without me; I couldn’t do it without him. But there’s the joy of that fellowship as he says, “I’m going to let you help me fly this airplane. God says, “I want to let you help me to run the universe, and the way we are going to do it is through prayer. When we pray we have the privilege of working with God.”

As we have seen, God’s sovereignty is the main theme of the book of Daniel and yet we also see through Daniel that prayer was essential in how God worked out His plans through His people. Daniel, who with His finite mind, struggled to understand the workings of an infinite

God, was persuaded, as we should be, that God moves in the world through His praying people.

Main idea: Men and women of prayer abide in the word of God in order to know the will of God so that they can prayerfully advance the work of God.

This morning we are going to see from the life of Daniel, 3 factors about the prayer of men and women of God through which God works out His redemptive plans in the universe.

1. Men and women of prayer abide in the word of God

To begin with, men and women of prayer abide in the word of God. Remember, as we saw last week, sometime after the Medo-Persian empire conquered the Babylonians in the first year of the reign of Darius, Daniel had been reading Jeremiah 25:11-13. From Jeremiah, he learned that the prophesied 70-year exile of the Israelites, who were carried into Babylon in 605 BC, was coming to completion. This revelation moved Daniel to pray to God with great reverence, to confess the sins of his people and to petition God to bring them back home to Jerusalem.

Now after Daniel was moved on earth by the word of God to pray, things began to move swiftly in heaven. Beginning in verse 20 we read: *“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, ²¹ 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”* (Daniel 9:20-21).

Notice that Daniel had not even concluded his prayer before it set in motion the Angel Gabriel to assist Daniel with the burden of his heart. Twice Daniel mentioned that it was while he was still speaking that Gabriel came to him in swift flight.

The words *swift flight* seems to indicate the immediacy by which Daniel’s prayer was being answered. What was Daniel speaking to

God in prayer that caused such a swift response from the spiritual realm? Remember, Daniel was moved to pray by the revelation he received from abiding in the word of God. The scriptures moved him to pray and his scripture saturated prayers moved heaven to respond.

It's been said, "The prayer that gets to heaven starts in heaven." Or as Adrian Rogers also said, "Prayer is the Holy Spirit finding a desire in the heart of the Father, putting that desire into our hearts and then sending it back to heaven in the power of the cross." Adrian Rogers

Sadly, we have many professing Christians today that have been deceived by the prosperity preachers who teach their followers to "name it and claim it" when they pray. They falsely teach that believers have the power through faith filled words to speak things into existence. This is nowhere taught in the scriptures.

It is true, Jesus taught that we are to pray in faith and the Bible also teaches that without faith we cannot please God. But the prayer of faith that pleases God and moves heaven is not name it and claim it, "believe it and you can achieve it" or "positive thinking." Faith is as good as its object. And according to the word of God in Hebrew 11:6 and Romans 10:17 the object and origin of faith that moves heaven is God and His living word.

Let me be clear, prayer that moves heaven comes from the heart of man. However, it doesn't begin in the heart of man. Prayer begins in the heart of God, which we can take on as we immerse ourselves in the word of God and are awakened to the will of God by the Spirit of God.

One Christian author explains it this way: "We restore prayer to its context in God's word. Prayer is not something we think up to get God's attention or enlist his favor. Prayer is answering speech. The first word is God's word. Prayer is a human word and is never the first word, never the primary word, never the initiating and shaping word simply because we are never first; never primary... The first word everywhere and always is God's word to us, not ours to him" (Eugene Peterson).

Let me reiterate, effective prayer comes from the heart. Jesus made it clear that we should not pray with empty words, even if they are biblically sound. It's been said, It's better to pray with heart and no words than with words and no heart. God hears the groans of our hearts uttered in the Spirit.

But although it's vital that we share our hearts with God as we pray, it is primary and essential that we allow Him to share His heart with us. Like Daniel, this happens as we pray, first and foremost, from His word. Daniel was moved by the word of God to pray and in turn his prayers moved heaven. The prayer that gets to heaven starts in heaven.

This brings us to our second point.

2. Men and women of prayer align with the will of God

In addition to abiding in the word of God, men and women of prayer align with the will of God. After the angel came to Gabriel in answer to Daniel's prayer to restore his people to their land, we read: *"He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. ²³ 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. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision" (Daniel 9:22-23).*

How was Daniel's prayer for restoration to the land answered? It's important to note that the angel did not come to Daniel to transport the people of God back to Jerusalem. Rather he came to make Daniel understand what God was up to and to give him greater insight into God's redemptive plans.

Do you know, throughout history, Presidents of the United States, along with other governmental leaders in their administration and military, convene in secret to devise plans and strategies for the defense of our country. Some of these plans, which have to be carried out, are top secret. So, in their planning they also select certain

specialized individuals or groups in government agencies or in the military to carry out these top-secret plans.

Likewise, there were plans being discussed, decisions being made and sentences being decreed in the heavenly realm before the throne of God in Daniel's day that were made known to him. (Daniel 4:17; 7:9-10). In fact, we read in verse 23, that it was Daniel's prayer to God that led to a word going out in the spiritual realm and Gabriel was charged with making it known to Daniel.

Now, why was Daniel selected to be made to understand and to receive insight into what had been decreed in the courtroom of heaven? (Daniel 7:9-10). In addition to Daniel being a praying man, we read in verse 23: "*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*" (Daniel 9:23).

Let me ask you, was Daniel greatly loved by God because of the kind of man he was or was he the kind of man he was because he was greatly loved by God? The apostle John says that we love God because He first loved us. There is no doubt that Daniel was in awe of God's holiness and covenant keeping love. Daniel was the faithful man that he was because he knew God.

So, in one sense God's love and grace made Daniel the man that he was. But in another sense God also loved the kind of man that Daniel was. God delighted in Daniel's faithfulness and obedience. God highly treasured and esteemed Daniel for the love that he had for His people and for the way that he interceded for them in prayer.

Now in the old testament the Hebrew word, *hesed* is used to describe the covenant keeping love of God for His people. But in Daniel 9:23 the words *greatly loved* is a translation of a different Hebrew word, *chemdah*, which means, pleasant, desirable or precious.

As moms and dads, we love our children. However, we are not always pleased with their attitudes and actions. In fact, as loving parents, we will discipline our children when they act up; not reward bad behavior.

God does the same with His children (Hebrews 12). God greatly loves all His children in Christ, but not all His children experience the same level of closeness and intimacy with the father.

The more we know the love of God the more we will love, trust and obey Him. And the more we are shaped by His love the greater our capacity to trust and obey Him. And the more we trust and obey the more He can entrust us with His kingdom assignments.

Remember that Gabriel coming to Daniel was in answer to Daniel's prayer to forgive the people of God, and bring them back home to Jerusalem for the sake of God's name. Daniel, whose prayer sprung from the word of God and whose heart was aligned with the will of God, is about to be given even greater insight into the redemptive plans of God. But for what purpose?

This question brings us to our final point.

3. Men and women of prayer advance the work of God

Men and women of prayer not only abide in the word of God and are aligned with the will of God, men and women of prayer advance the work of God. Remember that Daniel began to pray because he learned from Jeremiah that the prophesied 70 years of desolation upon Jerusalem, because of the sin of the people of God, was drawing near.

The people of God would be allowed to return to Jerusalem and restore the worship of God in the temple. But as we will see from Gabriel's revelation, what the people of God needed most was not to return to their homeland. Rather they needed an answer to the sin problem that led them to be carried away into exile in the first place.

Daniel is going to be shown that God has a redemptive plan that will not only deal with their physical exile after 70 years, but with their spiritual exile after 70 weeks of years, which adds up to 490 years.

It's important to note here that we often want a quick solution to our problems, which often do not deal with the root issues. But God wants to do more than just deal with the symptoms, He wants to deal with the main cause, namely sin. Beginning in verse 24 we read:

“Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy” (Daniel 9:24 NKJV).

Now before we unpack this prophecy, it's important to note that it's one of the most important prophecies found in the entire Old Testament. It is one of the most important not because all commentators agree on all the details of Daniel's Seventy Weeks (they don't) or because it reveals who the coming anti-Christ will be or the date of the Lord's return. It's one of the most important prophecies because it pointed to the coming of the Messiah, who would solve man's greatest problem by putting an end to sin and bring in everlasting righteousness (v.24). And as Gabriel explains in verse 24, this redemptive plan will be accomplished in seventy weeks.

Now in the language of the Old Testament, a week refers to a unit of seven and not necessarily a week consisting of days. Like for example, in Genesis 29:27, Laban tells Jacob to *complete the week of this one* which in context clearly speaks to serving seven years for Rachel.

Likewise, the seventy weeks in which the Messiah will atone for sin and bring in everlasting righteousness, most commentators agree, refers to seventy weeks of years (70 x 7) which adds up to 490 years.

Now when does this prophetic time clock begin in which the Messiah accomplishes His redemptive plan? Beginning in verse 25: *“Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself;”* (Daniel 9:25-26a NKJV)

So Gabriel reveals that the prophetic time clock, which will culminate with the fulfillment of the Messiah's redemptive plans, began when the command to restore and build Jerusalem was given. There's some debate as to when the command was given, but it's very likely that Gabriel is speaking of the decree of Artaxerxes I to Ezra in 458 BC recorded in Ezra 7:11-26).

Notice also that at the end of verse 25, the first seven weeks (49 years) is separated from the 62 weeks (434 years). Some commentators suggests that after the command was issued, the 7 weeks or 49 years represented the troublesome years it took for the city of Jerusalem and its walls to be rebuilt as the book of Nehemiah records.

Now following the 7 weeks plus the 62 weeks, verse 26 records what is at the heart of this prophecy, namely that afterwards the Messiah will be cut off. Seven weeks of years plus the sixty two weeks of years equals 69 weeks or 483 years. So, as one commentator explains, "If [the command given to Ezra in] 458 BC is correct, 483 years brings us to AD 26-27—the time of Christ and the beginning of His public ministry. This is a remarkable prediction and fulfillment. What amazing accuracy!

Then, sometime after the sixty-ninth week, probably a short time after, Messiah is cut off and left with nothing (v.26a). He is put to death and appears to be 'cut off from the land of the living' (Isaiah 53:8). James Boice summarizes well our text at this point: 'By whatever set of calculations one makes, the point is that by the end of the sixty-nine weeks of years [or shortly after] the great work of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ for sin should be completed.'" Danny Akin

Now after the Messiah is cut off shortly after the 69 weeks, Gabriel continues in verse 26: "*And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined.*" (Daniel 9:26). Many commentators agree that the people of the prince who is to come is referring to the Roman people, who under the rulership of

the Roman general Titus, besieged Jerusalem and destroyed the second temple in 70AD.

As we learned from Daniel's other prophecies of coming antichrist figures, like Antiochus Epiphanies, throughout history there have been many anti-Christ's that bear the characteristics of the final anti-Christ recorded in Revelation 13. With this in mind, it appears from Daniel 9:27 that although the destruction of Jerusalem took place in 70 AD, as prophesied in verse 26, this event is also pointing to the final anti-Christ.

Beginning in verse 27 we read: *"Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering"* (Daniel 9:27a NKJV).

Notice that this anti-Christ figure, who will bring destruction upon Jerusalem, will confirm a covenant for one week. This one week is referring to the final week of the 70 weeks of prophecy, which at the end will bring everlasting righteousness. During the middle of the final week or 7 year period, this final anti-Christ will break a covenant that he made with the people of God, commit abominations and bring an end to the sacrifice and offerings of God's people. In other words, he will persecute the people of God and forbid the worship of the true God or anyone else but himself (2 Thess 2:4; Revelation 13:8,14-17).

Now in view of the fact that the book of Revelation and Jesus himself refers to the abomination and desolation of Daniel 70th week as yet future, why hasn't it all been fulfilled if the prophetic seventy week time clock began at the decree in Ezra around 458 BC?

The answer to this is that after the Messiah was cut off after the 69th week, there was a pause in the prophetic time clock that in verse 23 was determined for the people of God. I found J.D. Greers summary of this final week very helpful and concise:

"Now, there's two ways you could interpret this. One is that this last week of years are not literal years: That week represents the final

chapter of human history, which we are in now, that has just stretched out for a long time.

The second way to interpret this, and I believe the correct way, is that after the Messiah was cut off, the timeline was paused, and we are now in a parenthetical period called “the church age,” where God has shifted the focus of His activity away from the nation of Israel to the church, which is comprised mostly of Gentiles (or non-Jews). But at the end of time, when the Antichrist officially makes his debut, the focus will re-shift to Israel, and [man will] enter into that last seventieth week, a 7 year period we call “the Tribulation.” The Tribulation of the book of Revelation is about Daniel’s seventieth week.

Here’s why I strongly prefer that second interpretation:

- First, the first 69 weeks were literal. It was roughly 483 years to when Jesus died. So why switch the last 7 and make them an elastic metaphor?
- Second, as I noted, the book of Revelation is all about this 70th week and Revelation strongly implies this is something in the future and not something we’re living in now. There are a few commentators that try to argue we are living in the midst of Revelation now, but I just don’t find their reasoning that compelling. I could be wrong, but it just doesn’t seem to me to be written that way.
- Third, vs. 24 says that “Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city...” For Daniel, “your people” would be the Jews and “your city” would be Jerusalem. These seventy weeks focus on ISRAEL. Well, right now, as I’ve said, the focus of God’s work is in the church, which is mostly made up of Gentiles (or, non-Jews). In fact, Paul says in Romans 9–11 that God has temporarily set aside his focus on Israel to build the church among the Gentiles, but one day in the future, Paul says, God will resume his focus on Israel and when he does, more people will get saved than in any previous chapter in human history. It’s gonna be awesome. But the point is, Daniel says these seventy weeks are about Israel. We live in an ellipses right now. And there’s another really terrible week coming.”

Now concerning this final week often referred to as the tribulation period, Gabriel concludes in verse 27: *“And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate” Daniel (9:27b).*

Gabriel’s final words about the final Antichrist is that he does not have the final word. The same God who decreed, determined and precisely predicted the coming of the Messiah, who makes an end to sin, will make an end of the anti-christ and bring in everlasting righteousness.

Now, as we come to the end of the message, keep in mind that Gabriel revealed this seventy week prophecy to Daniel while he was confessing sin and praying for the people of God under judgement to return to Jerusalem. And in answer to Daniel’s prayer, Gabriel not only reveals that a decree will be made that will allow the people of God to return from physical exile to Jerusalem, but that God was going to deal with their spiritual exile due to sin, which would continue to plague them for many years to come.

How many of you know, God answers prayer? But far too often we seek God for what we think will serve our earthly interests, rather than seeking first the interests of the kingdom of God which will make a lasting difference in our lives.

We want God to change our outward circumstances into what we think will make us happier. But God wants to first change us on the inside which will bring a joy and contentment in our lives that is not contingent upon outward circumstances.

O listen to these insightful words application from one devotional writer: “When people talk about Daniel’s seventy weeks, or especially the seventieth week, they rarely talk about the atoning sacrifice of the Messiah. Yet we have no doubt that this is the main point of the vision. We want dates and details, all the while God wants us to focus on His mission to [seek and save lost sinners.] (Acts 1:8)

It's not hard to imagine Israel getting distracted by the date of their possible return to the land, just like we are easily distracted by the little and big details of our lives. But when we pause and zoom out, we see that the Messiah's mission is the center of God's plan.

This means that God dealing with sin was more important than Israel getting back to the land. It means that God dealing with sin is more important than you getting that promotion, or solving that family problem, or never getting sick.

What are issues in your life that might be distracting you from the big picture? What are ways you can identify sin as the root cause of those problems? Now ask yourself, what does Jesus' ministry, [which began] 2,000 years ago, have to do with my problems today? Maybe you've been seeking the wrong kinds of solutions for your problems. Take time to repent of your sin, and praise Jesus for being the solution."
Ryan Boys

Conclusion

Although Daniel received great vision from God, He never fully understood all things. But one thing was clear to Daniel: God gives the privilege of working with Him in the administration of His kingdom to His redeemed people who, like Daniel, are men and women of effectual prayer. Men and women of effectual prayer abide in the word of God, and align with the will of God in order to advance the redemptive work of Christ to the glory of His name. May we be found faithful.