



# gracefellowship

Daniel: Thriving in Exile  
January 10, 2021  
God's Unexpected Response

Prior to Christmas we were walking through the Old Testament book of Daniel. We took a break to focus on the season of Advent, so today we are returning to Daniel and in the next few weeks we will wrap up our study of the book together.

Recap of where we have been:

- Daniel was part of a group of Israelites who were taken into captivity to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. He was a teenager when this occurred. The majority of Daniel's life is spent in exile. But his faith in God allowed him to thrive even in hostile times.
- Daniel was given a special ability from God to interpret dreams and God also spoke to Daniel through visions.
- The first half of the book reads almost like a narrative, or story, as we follow Daniel and some of his friends through the trials of living for God in a pagan culture. One of the things we saw in the opening chapters of Daniel is that it is possible to honor and obey God, living for His glory, even when no one else is willing to do so.
- The second major theme of the book we have discussed almost weekly is that God is sovereign over the affairs of mankind and He can use whoever He pleases for His purposes and whatever circumstances He pleases for His divine purposes of redemption.
- The second half of the book of Daniel is filled with dreams and visions that are difficult to understand, but that showed God's plans for His people. Daniel was shown visions of future kingdoms that would dominate the world after the fall of Babylon. The time of the writing we will look at today finds Daniel in his 80s.

The last time we talked about Daniel we were in chapter 9 of the book and saw Daniel reading Scripture and praying. Daniel was reading the writings of Jeremiah and came to understand through his prophecies that the exile of God's people would last 70 years. Daniel started doing the math and realized that time was closely approaching, so he began to pray to God about these things.

**:: Daniel 9:2-3**

**2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.**

**3 So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.**

Daniel prays and fasts, pleading with God for the ability for his people to return to Jerusalem. Daniel confesses his sin and the sin of the people and seeks God's forgiveness. If you missed the message on the first half of Daniel 9 I would encourage you to go back and check that out on our website from November. Today we come to the second half of the chapter and we will see God's response to Daniel's prayer.

Before we jump into that text let me ask a question:

Have you ever prayed and gotten an immediate response from God about something? Sometimes God answers our prayers immediately, giving us exactly what we asked for. Other times God makes us wait. Sometimes God doesn't answer how we would like, but we still see His goodness in the answer He gives.

Illustration: When I was in college my Dad owned a car dealership. The business started to struggle and it became apparent that without God's intervention we were going to lose the business. One night in the middle of the winter I went with a friend of mine to the dealership late one night and determined we were going to pray over the cars and lay hands on each car on the lot, asking God to bring a buyer for that car. We asked God to sell every car on the lot! It got a little weird when the police showed up and asked us what we were doing...

Here's the end of the story. The cars didn't sell. God didn't answer the prayer. At least not the way we wanted or in the timing we wanted! A few months later when a decision was made to sell the business a man came in and bought the dealership. I told my friend who prayed with me that night and he said, "God sold all the cars at one time!" It wasn't what we wanted. It wasn't what we expected. But God sold the cars!

Daniel is going to experience something similar today as we see God come to answer His prayer. Pick up with me and lets read the end of chapter 9 together.

**:: Daniel 9:20-27**

**20 While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for his holy hill**

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**21 while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice.**

**22 He instructed me and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding.**

**23 As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the word and understand the vision:**

**24 “Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place.**

**25 “Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.**

**26 After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.**

**27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him. ”**

Here’s the first thing I want us to see today:

**There is power in prayer!**

Daniel prays and God responds. Now, I want you to hear me clearly on this: God does not always operate this way! I’m not trying to build a theology that says “if you pray, God will always answer you quickly and just as you want!” That is not always the case. Nor do I want you to hear me say that just because you fast and pray God has to do exactly what you want. Daniel had been fasting and praying, that’s true. But look at what Gabriel says to Daniel about why God responds so quickly in this instance:

22 He instructed me and said to me, “Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding.

23 As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed.

Daniel had found favor with God and had a special relationship with God that served the purpose of God revealing His plans for the people of Israel through Daniel. Next week we are going to see a bit of a different scenario when Daniel prays that will give us greater insight into why our prayers may not be answered immediately.

There is power in prayer. And while we don’t bend God over backward to our every whim when we pray, we are invited to make our petitions known to Him. When we fast and pray, like Daniel did, we seek God’s will and we learn to submit to what He reveals.

**We are told to come to God boldly and then we learn to be content with what He reveals!**

**:: Hebrews 4:14-16**

**14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.**

**15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.**

**16 Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.**

I was convicted this week in studying for this that while I have occasionally prayed for God to end the pandemic our world is facing, I haven’t seriously cried out to Him and fasted to seek God’s favor in the matter. We talked last Sunday about the fact that sometimes God calls us to fast individually and sometimes we fast collectively for a specific purpose. Today, I want to call us as a body of believers to join together and engage in a time of prayer and fasting, asking God to bring and end to this pandemic. Since this is new to many of us, let’s start off simply. Would you join me tomorrow and fast from one meal and commit to pray for God to intervene in our world, specifically concerning the pandemic? Let’s fast together as a church from breakfast to dinner and when we feel hungry through the afternoon, let’s cry out to God together to physically heal our land.

As we get back to the text we are going to see God’s answer to Daniel’s prayer. It’s not exactly what he anticipated.

Remember, Daniel knew from the prophecies of Jeremiah that 70 years of captivity were required of God’s people. But because in exile the people of God did not repent or return to the Lord, the 70 years are going to be extended.

**:: Daniel 9:24**

**24 “Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place.**

Daniel is told not just 70 years, but seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed. In our world we typically order things by tens. We measure decades. In the Jewish world, they ordered things in 7s.

- Each 7 days you were to rest. The Sabbath Cycle.
- Each 7 years they were to let the land rest. They were also to return land to the former owners, forgive debts and set slaves free. This was the Jubilee Cycle. Each 7<sup>th</sup> year was known as the year of Jubilee.

When Gabriel tells Daniel God has ordained seventy 'sevens,' we can take that to mean seventy sets of seven years. In other words, 490 years are still in God's plans for the people to experience, captivity, hardship and persecution. There will be periodic releases of the Jews to return to Jerusalem, but we will see in a few minutes it will not be a wholesale return like the exodus from Egypt.

When you read your Bible and you come to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah you will read the stories of the Persian King allowing groups of Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple and the City with its walls.

God takes these 490 years and breaks them down into different groups. Read verses 25-27 again.

**:: Daniel 9:25-27**

**25 "Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.**

**26 After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.**

**27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him. "**

First we see seven 'sevens,' or 49 years. Then he says there will be sixty-two 'sevens,' or 434 years. In total that is 483 years. God tells Daniel over the next 483 years the rebuilding of the temple, the city of Jerusalem and the walls around Jerusalem will occur. He says, "it will be rebuilt with streets and a trench- in other words, it will be completely rebuilt- but he also says this will happen in times of trouble. The people are going to return to their land and rebuild their capital, but life will not be easy. We want things to be simple and easy, but that's not life! God tells Daniel, yes, the exile is going to end, but don't expect to go back to a glamorous situation. The people of God were still paying for the sins of their rebellion.

Here's what we learn about God in this: He shows both grace and justice.

God allows His people to return to their land: He extends grace to them. But their sins will be held to account. Persistent sin will be met with years of hardship. God is full of grace, but sin must be punished. We see this ultimately played out with Jesus on the cross, giving His life for our sins. God not only graciously forgives us, but He also places our sin on Jesus and punishes Him. Our sin can be

forgiven because Jesus has removed it from our account, taken it upon Himself and paid for it by His blood.

Finally we see one last 'seven.' In this seven year period of time a ruler, or as Gabriel says, "an anointed one," will bring a treaty of peace to the Jewish people, but half way through the treaty he will break it and will end the Temple sacrifices, set up an abomination that causes desolation and will be a problem for the people of God until his end comes.

There are two primary ways people interpret this passage- and it's tricky, but I want to help you make sense of it (if I can!).

1<sup>st</sup> Interpretation: These are 490 consecutive years from the time King Cyrus signs a decree allowing the Jews to rebuilt the city and the walls of Jerusalem until the time of the "anointed one" comes to bring destruction against the people and once again destroys Jerusalem. In Daniel's prior visions this person has been Antiochus Epiphenes. In Chapter 8 he brings a rebellion that causes desolation and in Chapter 11 he sets up an abomination that causes desolation. In 167 BC Antiochus went to the Temple in Jerusalem, stopped the sacrifices to God and placed an image of Zeus in the Temple. This all happened prior to the time of Jesus.

2<sup>nd</sup> Interpretation: After the first 483 years there is a gap from the time of Jesus and into the church age that is unspecified. At the end of that gap the final 7 year period will occur called the tribulation. This view sees the ruler as the Anti-Christ and the end of his reign as the time of the return of Jesus.

Because everything in the book of Daniel and his prophesies point to the 4 kingdoms that follow Babylon and Antiochus Epiphenes as the final ruler prior to the end of our Old Testament writings, I tend to lean more toward the first interpretation. However, I believe John borrowed heavily in his writing of the book of Revelation from this passage to describe for the church what will take place in the future. Satan tends to repeat himself and the time of the very end will look the same- there will be a desire to put an end to the worship of God in order to exalt the worship of a false god.

Here's what I really want us to see, though. The point of the passage is not to get the proper interpretation of the 70 weeks. The goal is to show that God is in complete control. He will do what He pleases...and we can trust Him no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in! That's good news for the age in which we live. There is a lot of unrest in our political and social and religious climates. It's easy to be discouraged and throw our hands up and believe that everything is out of control. But rest assured, Church, God is in control! He has a purpose and a plan. And though He may not answer your prayers as you would like or in the timeframe in which you would like, He is in control and He is working all things out for His express purposes.

And here's the last thing I want to leave with you today: **God's express purposes are always for His glory and for our good.**

You can trust God even when you don't understand what He is doing or why He is doing it!

Stay faithful in prayer. There is power in prayer. Trust God with doing what is best for His desired ends and the fulfillment of His will in your life and in the world.

- Pray