**Believers in Babylon Series**

**“Window Prayers and God’s Answer”**

**Daniel 9.1-27**

**Preaching Prelude**

In our current series entitled “Believers in Babylon” we’ve been looking at the book of Daniel and how God enabled Daniel to live for the glory of God as an exile in a strange land.

Today we come to Daniel chapter nine where Daniel offers up prayers and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. (9.3) God answers Daniel’s prayer with a message of hope of the future fulfillment of God’s redemption through Christ. (9.24) As the ushers come forward and we prepare to give the Lord His tithes, and our offerings and alms please listen to an adaption of Daniel’s prayer as our call to worship this morning.

**Call to Worship**

*Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servants. Give ear, our God, and hear; open Your eyes and see. We do not make requests of You because we are righteous, but because of Your great mercy. Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For Your sake, my God, do not delay.* (adapted from Daniel 9.17-19 - NIV)

**Scripture Reading**

*In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom—****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.*

***4****I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed:**“Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments,****5****we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws.****6****We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.* ***7****“Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame—the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.****8****We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, Lord, because we have sinned against you.****9****The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him;****10****we have not obeyed the Lord our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets.****11****All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you.*

*“Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you.****12****You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing on us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem.****13****Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come on us, yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth.****14****The Lord did not hesitate to bring the disaster on us, for the Lord our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him.*

***15****“Now, Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong.****16****Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.*

***17****“Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary.****18****Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy.****19****Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.”*

***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—****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.”*

**Introduction:**

The second half of the book of Daniel chapters 7-12 are dreams and visions that Daniel received during previous years recorded in chapters 1-6. In those earlier chapters we saw that Daniel was forcibly brought to Babylon as a youth to be trained and serve in the Babylonian Empire. Seventy years have passed and Daniel is still serving as a trusted and skilled government official. But now he wasn’t serving the Babylonia Empire but rather the Persian Empire. Remember God told Daniel that Babylon would fall to the inferior kingdom and we saw in chapter five that kingdom was the Persian Empire. After conquering Babylonia, Cyrus, the King of Persia appointed man by the name of Darius the Mede to govern the territory of Babylonia under Persian control. (5.31; 6.1, 28) I am sharing all of this background information because verse one of chapter nine reads, *In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom.* (9.1) Daniel had survived the collapse of the Babylonian Empire and had risen to the higher ranks of the Persian government that was now under the oversight of Darius the Mede. (6.1-3)

One of the first acts of Cyrus the king of Persia after he defeated Babylon was to liberate the Jewish exiles and their vessels of worship that Nebuchadnezzar had taken captive. (Ezra 1.1-11) Cyrus allowed and even financed the exiles return to Jerusalem and allowed them to begin the rebuilding of the temple. Cyrus’ governmental philosophy was the exact opposite of Nebuchadnezzar. Cyrus thought Nebuchadnezzar’s philosophy of captivity would lead to civil unrest and rebellion. “Why not let them go home and worship their own gods? I control the whole territory anyway.”

So, the first wave of exiles returned to Jerusalem. This wasn’t a festival family reunion or a hero’s homecoming. The land was devastated, the Temple was destroyed, and everything had been in ruins for seventy years. Families had been torn apart for decades. Homes had been demolished and the fields lay barren. These exiles returning to Jerusalem didn’t take Daniel by surprise. He continues, *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.**So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.* (9.2-3)

Daniel had anticipated from Scripture that the people of God would return to Jerusalem. Daniel and his friends had either heard the reading of Jeremiah’s writing, obtained a scroll with Jeremiah’s prophecies, or both. Let me quickly highlight two places in Jeremiah that tells about the exiles return after seventy years.

One is Jeremiah 25 where that Prophet declares that the exile was due to Israel’s disobedience and at the end writes, *This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.* (Jer.25.11)

The other is Jeremiah 29 where we find a message of hope. *This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.**For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.* (Jer.29.10-13)

And that is actually what Daniel is doing here in chapter nine! Daniel bows before the Lord, calling out and praying with all of his heart, knowing that the Lord will listen to his prayers. This is the bold confidence we need as we sit in our Babylon. We need to boldly seek the Lord to bring restoration to the broken things in our lives. You might be sitting there thinking, I agree Pastor – I do need that type of spiritual confidence in my life. I do need the Lord to restore the broken things in my life. So how to I pray those sorts of prayers? We will get to that in a moment but before we do I want to focus on something that will help us understand Daniel’s prayers and God’s answer.

Notice that Daniel’s petition to God is summarized in verses eighteen and nineteen.

*Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.”* (9.18-19)

Daniel is praying for God to restore His people, Israel, and His city, Jerusalem. It is important to understand that Israel was not just any people and Jerusalem was not just any city. The nation of Israel was chosen by God to produce the Messiah and the city of Jerusalem symbolized the greatest of God’s Kingdom and the reign of God in this world and the world to come. For most of Daniel’s life the city and the Temple laid in ruins and the people had been held in captivity. So on the outside God’s Kingdom was in ruin and God’s people were slaves to this world. Naturally it would have been easily to say, “your God is dead and His Kingdom is nonexistent.” But Daniel held the Word of God in his hands and the seventy years had passed. The first exiles were returning to Jerusalem just as the Prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah said they would! God was fulfilling His good promise to bring His people back to Jerusalem and this brought Daniel to his knees pleading with God to bring restoration so that the Messiah would come and bring the restoration of all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven. (Col.1.20)

In chapter six, which is the same time frame of chapter nine, we are told that three times a day Daniel would go home to his upstairs room where the windows were opened towards Jerusalem, get down on his knees, pray, and give thanks to God. (6.10) Daniel’s prayer in chapter nine is most likely one of those window prayers.

**Window Prayers**

As I have shared before Scripture records that Daniel would pray *where the windows opened toward Jerusalem* and this is recorded on purpose. God was making a point when He included these words in the divine record. Let me explain. Although Jerusalem is a physical city with tremendous biblical history, the Bible uses Jerusalem in a theological or spiritual sense to identify God’s Kingdom. Although for most of Daniel’s life the city of Jerusalem had been in ruins the city still symbolized the greatest of God’s Kingdom and the reign of God in this world and the world to come. By faith Jerusalem was the focal point of the messianic hope in the coming Christ. Jerusalem symbolized the kingdom of God past, present, and future. To pray *where the windows opened toward Jerusalem* gave Daniel the opportunity three times a day to realign with God’s direction for the world and to renew himself with God’s purposes and values. For Daniel praying *where the windows opened toward Jerusalem* was not as much to let his prayers out, as it was to let God in. And Daniel’s prayer in chapter nine is an example of Daniel letting God into his heart and realigning his faith for Messianic restoration.

Daniel took his need for realignment of faith in Messianic restoration very seriously. I like how the NASB translates verse three, “*So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes.”* (9.3) It is very easy to neglect giving attention to the Lord during times of transition. Remember Daniel had survived the transition of power from the Babylonians to the Persians. This would be hundred times worst than changing jobs, supervisors, or corporate responsibilities. We should ask ourselves, What are the things that distract us from giving attention to the Lord? Many believers allow the world to dictate to them what to give their attention to but not Daniel. It is also very easy to neglect giving attention to the Lord when restoration takes too long. We become discouraged and start believing that the Lord will not fulfill His promises so we turn our attention to other things instead of the Lord but not Daniel. He had been giving attention to the Lord for over seventy years and he is not going to stop now. So, what are the things that cause you to become spiritually distracted?

Daniel recognized his tendency to be distracted so he supplements his prayers and supplications with auxiliary aids *with fasting, sackcloth and ashes* to keep him focused on spiritual realignment*.* He fasted that he might not be distracted by food. He put aside comfortable clothing for sackcloth (burlap) that he might not be distracted by worldly comforts. He applied ashes to his skin that he might not be distracted by a false sense of cleanliness before the Lord. Basically, Daniel did everything spiritually and physically possible to maintain his focus on Messianic restoration. And we should follow his example. Daniel was too old and probably too infirmed to physically travel back to Jerusalem so he would devote himself to prayer and supplication to realign his faith for Messianic restoration.

Jesus asks the question, *“When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”* (Lk.18.8) I believe following Daniel’s example of daily realignment of our faith in Messianic restoration and the truth that Christ fixes broken things, will enable us to answer “yes” to the Lord’s question.

Let’s look at Daniel’s prayer to learn how to pray with confidence that the Lord will restore the broken things in our lives.

**Daniel’s Prayer**

Daniel’s prayer can be divided into two sections. Daniel’s confession in verses 4-15 and Daniel’s petitions in verse 16-19. Instead of going through Daniel’s prayer verse by verse allow me to highlight some specific attributes of his prayer that we can implement into our prayer life.

1. Daniel was Honest about Sin

Verses 4-6 summarizes confession: *I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed:**“Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws.**We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.* (9.4-6)

Daniel knew that disobedience against the Lord was what led to the exile in the first place (Jer.25.8-9) and he was not going to whitewash sin now the return had started. Daniel describes sin in ten different ways: done wrong, been wicked, rebelled, turned away (vs.5), not listened (vs.6), shame, unfaithfulness (vs.7), have not obeyed (vs.10), and transgressed (vs.11). Daniel knew that sin comes in different shades, shapes, and sizes but the bottom line is “sin is sin.” Acknowledging sin as sin is the first step towards restoration. Without recognition there can be no restoration. Daniel doesn’t play the victim card. He makes clear confession like the David in Psalm 51, *Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight.* (Ps.51.4a) Like the Prodigal Son confessing to his father, *“Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight.”* (Lk.15.21) Daniel doesn’t shift the focus on Babylon’s arrogance, corruption, oppression, violence, and injustice. Daniel knew it was *time for judgment to begin with the household of God.* (IPt.4.17)

1. Daniel’s Prayer was based on God’s Character

Listen to how Daniel describes God’s character: *The great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant of love* (9.4). *The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving* (9.9).

*The Lord our God is righteous in everything He does* (9.14b). *Because of Your great mercy.* (9.18). *Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people bear Your Name.”* (9.18-19)Daniel was pleading for God to uphold His own character.

1. Daniel’s Prayer was based on God’s Word

The Shorter catechism asks the question, “What rule has God given for our direction in prayer?” And the first part of the answer is, “The whole Word of God is of use to direct us in prayer.” (WSC#99) Daniel diffently knew that! Daniel’s prayer is saturated with scriptural echoes from Leviticus and Deuteronomy, from the Psalms, and of course from Jeremiah. And yet, this is Daniel’s own, urgent, intense, intimate engagement with God. Daniel prays to God echoing God’s Word back to Him. Like an earthly father loves to hear his child say, “Just like my Daddy always said,” so the Lord loves to hear His words expressed back to Him. This is a good model to follow.

*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—**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.* *He instructed me and said to me, “Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. 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:* (9.20-23)

**God’s Answer**

This is one of those “behind the scenes” passages. Here we discover that God not only heard Daniel’s prayers but also sent His answer as soon as Daniel began praying. As the Lord said in Isaiah, “*Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.”* (Is.65.24) As Jesus told us, “*your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him.”* (Mt.6.8) And the Apostle John tells us, “*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him.* (IJn.5.14-15)

What was the Lord answer to Daniel’s prayer? Remember that Daniel understood from the scroll of Jeremiah that the exile would last for seventy years. Daniel had lived through those seventy years and now Israel’s return to their homeland to restore Jerusalem was standing at the threshold of history. This prospect of restoration caused Daniel to confess Israel’s sin and to ask God to restore His city and His people without delay.

But Gabriel says, *“Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city.”* (9.24a) God’s answer to Daniel was for him not to fixate on the seventy years, the return of the exiles, and the restoration of Jerusalem. God wants Daniel to think about the bigger picture of what the return will bring to world history. Stop thinking about the seventy and start thing about the *“seventy ‘sevens’*that *are decreed for your people and your holy city.”* In essence God is telling Daniel to stop thinking about the 70 years but start thinking about the 70 times 7 years. Stop thinking about the 70 years and start thinking about 490.

Gabriel makes it clear that the *“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.”* (9.24) [NOTE: the word *place* is added at the end of verse 24 by translators and is not in the original]

Basically six things will happen 1) *to finish transgression,* 2) *to put an end to sin,* 3) *to atone for wickedness,* 4) *to bring in everlasting righteousness,*5) *to seal up vision and prophecy,* 6) *and to anoint the Most Holy.”* (9.24)

Most scholars agree that verse 24 describes the redemptive outcomes of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Gabriel was making it clear to Daniel that the return and restoration of Israel after seventy years was not the consummation of the Kingdom of God but after *seventy ‘sevens’*the spiritual foundation for the Kingdom of God will be laid when the Lord Jesus Christ will *finish transgression, puts an end to sin, atones for wickedness, brings in everlasting righteousness, seals up vision and prophecy, and* the Father Himself will *anoint the Most Holy.*

In verses 25, 26, and 27 Gabriel gives more detail behind the 490 by dividing it into three smaller units. He describes one unit of 49, another unit of 434, and the final unit of 7 all adding up to? You guessed it 490! Verses 25, 26, and 27 have caused more confusion, contradictions, and controversies than almost any other portion of the Bible. There are numerous interpretations given for these verses. All of this confusion goes against rule #3 in our ground rules for the interpretation of prophesy that I have shared you the last two-weeks.

Ground Rule #3: The prophecies of Daniel must be understood in relationship to and in light of the rest of Scripture without causing contradiction or confusion.

We would need to have a twelve-week course to unravel and unpack all of the different views surrounding these verses. On a personal note during my undergrad I was taught from one view concerning these verses and during my graduate studies I taught a totally different view. I have spent hours studying the different views concerning these verses. So in an attempt to “stay out of the theological weeds” and causing more confusion I am going to present a simple explanation that I believe is the most edifying. (Remember that’s Ground Rule #5)

Ground Rule #5: Often the simplest interpretation is the safest and most edifying.

***Seventy ‘sevens’***

The simple explanation is that *seventy ‘sevens’*is not necessary describing chronological clock-like calculation but rather represents God’s perfect redemption fulfilled in Christ. Let me explain. Seven has always been symbolic of God’s mark of completion. From the opening pages of Scripture God completed His perfect work of creation in the span of six days and rested on the seventh day. The seventh day is set aside as a day of rest to celebrate God’s perfect completion of creation – the Sabbath.

Later on in biblical history God ordained that every 7th year was to be a sabbatical year of rest for the land and after every 7th Sabbath year (every 49 years) the next year was to be set aside as the year of Jubilee. So let’s get it straight every seventh day, Sabbath, every seventh year, Sabbatical Year, and after every seventh Sabbatical Year, the year of Jubilee.

On the year of Jubilee all property was return to its original owner, all slaves were released, all debts were the cancelled, and all the land would lie in rest. The year of Jubilee was the year when justice, freedom, pardon, release, and restoration were experience by all of God’s people. It is no surprise that the year of Jubilee became the symbol of the ultimate redemption, release, and restoration that God would accomplish on behalf of His people.

Do you see it yet? When Gabriel declares that *seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city*what he saying that God has decreed a perfect completion for His work of redemption. Not just one seven (a Sabbath). Not just seven sevens (the Sabbath Year). Not just after seven Sabbath Years (Jubilee) But seventy sevens 490 (God’s perfect completion of all things – God’s perfect jubilee in Christ!) when God will *finish transgression, to put an end to sin, atone for wickedness, bring in everlasting righteousness, seal up vision and prophecy, and anoint the Most Holy –* our Lord Jesus Christ.

A simple interpretation is that the *seventy ‘sevens’*or 490 represent God’s perfect completion of redemption through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The 490 represents God’s perfect Jubilee, *seventy ‘sevens’* where Christ reconciles us to Himself, releases us from our slavery to this world, cancels all of our debts, and allows us to enter into His rest.

In essence Gabriel is telling Daniel that there will be a day in the future that God’s people will enjoy God’s perfect Jubilee through Christ and in that day the people of God will shout, “Yes we're free free, Forever we're free, Come join the song, Of all the redeemed.” (Lyrics from Death was Arrested) And that day has come through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ! God’s perfect Jubilee has come!

**Closing Thought**

The past two Sundays we have considered two of Daniel’s dreams, the dream of the four beasts (ch.7) and the dream of the ram and goat (ch.8). In both of these dream experiences caused Daniel to be emotional and physically drained. At the end of chapter seven Daniel writes, *I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale.* (7.28) At the conclusion of chapter eight Daniel writes*,**I, Daniel, was worn out. I lay exhausted for several days.* (8.27a) But at the end of chapter nine there is no mention of Daniel experiencing any distress. Why? At the beginning of chapter nine we find Daniel sitting in sackcloth and ashes but at the end there is no mention of mourning. Why?

Because Daniel understood that God will accomplish His perfect work of redemption and bring about the perfect Jubilee through His Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Through Gabriel’s message of hope Daniel entered into God’s perfect rest through Christ and discovered that God *provides for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.* (Is.61.3a)

Brothers and Sisters, God’s perfect Jubilee has come! Christ our Redeemer has come to set free those who are slaves and prisoners to sin. (Rom.8.2; Gal.5.1; 3.22) The debt of sin we owe to God was paid on the cross as Jesus died on our behalf (Col.2.13-14) and we are forgiven the debt forever. We are no longer in bondage, no longer slaves to sin, having been freed by Christ, and we can truly enter the rest God provides as we cease laboring to make ourselves acceptable to God by our own works. (Heb.4.9-10)

This morning let us offer praises to our God for bringing His perfect Jubilee through Christ. Let us together seek Him to restore all the broken things in our lives through Christ.

**Call to Prayer**

*There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest.* (Heb.4.9, 11a)

**Benediction**

*To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.*