

Daniel 9

Daniel's righteousness and his confession of sins

Daniel is an example of a righteous man. He was faithful to God in all aspects of his life. Already from the very first page of the book we learn that he and his three friends did not want to take part in the lifestyle of the Babylonians. In the following chapters they never disowned God, neither before the mighty king nor in times that they had to face death. Daniel remained faithful to the commandments of God, and is one of the major examples in the Bible of righteousness and perseverance in faith.

In Daniel 9, Daniel prays and speaks about his sins. His prayer is a confession of sins. In verses 4 through 14, the only thing Daniel does is confess his sinfulness and the sinfulness of his people, and the righteousness of God in punishing them.

The reason for Daniel's prayer is explained in the first verses of chapter 9. It is the first year of the new king, Darius, the first year after the Babylonian Empire was destroyed. Daniel was reading the scriptures in the book of the prophet Jeremiah. Through Jeremiah God prophesied that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.

Jeremiah 25:12-14 says:

Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste. I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. For many nations and great kings shall make slaves even of them, and I will recompense them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.

Daniel witnessed the destruction of the Babylonian Empire less than a year before. Now it was also the time that the exile of Judah would come to an end, according to this prophecy. This was the promise which God had given to his people and we would expect Daniel to start reminding God of that promise.

That is not what Daniel does first. First, Daniel himself is reminded of the sins of Israel. When he reads Jeremiah's prophecy of seventy years of God's wrath, he also reads the reason for it, namely all the terrible sins which Judah had committed against the LORD. Then Daniel confesses those sins. He realizes that the whole situation of Israel in the Babylonian Empire was because of their sins. But, after God punished them, the people of Israel did not turn back to God. Daniel says in verse 13, "As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not entreated the favor of the LORD our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth."

In verses 4-15, Daniel time and again confesses their sinfulness before God. When we look at these verses, then we see how often he speaks about their sins and wrongdoings. There are 4 phrases which he uses several times, in slightly different variations.

- we have sinned and done wrong (vv.5, 8, 11, 15)
- we have been wicked and rebelled (vv.5, 9)
- we have turned aside from your commands and laws (vv.5, 11)
- we have not listened to your servants the prophets (vv.6, 10)

It is not only that they did something wrong, just as anyone can unintentionally do. No, they sinned and did wrong, time and time again. Daniel even says that they were wicked and rebelled. They knowingly disobeyed God and rejected his commands. When the prophets came to warn them and to call them to repentance, they did not listen.

Daniel includes himself when he confesses his sin. He speaks about the people who are so wrong and who have sinned against God. But Daniel does not point the finger at what is going wrong among his people as if he did not participate. He confesses that he also did wrong and that the sins of Israel are his sins as well. The situation of Israel makes him realize that he does not deserve anything better than Israel does. He shares in the guilt of his people.

God loved Daniel and he blessed him. In the meantime Daniel did have to suffer under the consequences of God's wrath over his people. He also went into exile. Daniel realizes that. His reaction is not that he moves away from his people and dissociates from them, but he prays for his people and he includes himself confessing the sins of the people. He uses the words 'we' and 'us', not the words 'they' and 'them': 'We have sinned and done wrong'. Then, he also prays for his people and reminds God of his own Word which he gave through the prophet Jeremiah.

Daniel pleads for God's mercy

In verse 2 Daniel speaks about the Scriptures, and about the word of the LORD, given to Jeremiah the prophet. Already in Daniel's days the book of Jeremiah was considered to belong to the Scriptures. It is God's Word, spoken through Jeremiah.

It is God's own Word which spoke about the seventy years and it was this Word which Daniel read. Now he sees that this word is coming to fulfilment. This, the first year of Darius, is the time that Babylon is destroyed. In Jeremiah 29, Jeremiah spoke the Word of God that after the destruction of Babylon, God would bring an end to the exile of his people. In Jeremiah 29:10-12, we read:

When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you.

This is what Daniel read, and it is why he prays. In the meantime he realizes very well, that it is not because of Israel's own goodness, or their own righteousness, that God will fulfil his promise. This is what he confesses in verse 18 of our text, "For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy."

This is the only reason why God would listen to him and hear his prayer. Israel still sinned against God. So many of the Israelites had assimilated to the Babylonian lifestyle and the customs of others, in whose midst they lived. So many of the Israelites, who were scattered among the nations, had become part of those nations and did not serve God anymore. The prophet Isaiah had already prophesied that only a remnant would return. It is that remnant, those who remained faithful, who are longing for the days in which this promise will be fulfilled. It is the mercy of God that Judah was not completely destroyed when it was scattered among the nations.

It is this mercy, for which Daniel pleads. God showed his mercy when he delivered his people out of Egypt. Daniel reminds God of that in verse 15. God did such a wonderful work for his people, but only by his grace. At this time Daniel prays to God for his mercy, to perform again such a wonderful work, to bring his people back from exile, out of the land of slavery

in Babylon, in which they have lived for seventy years. Daniel prays, even though God had already foretold through Jeremiah and others that this would happen and that he would show mercy.

God's mercy would not end there. He would not just bring them back from exile, but he would also send a Saviour, the Messiah. Through his work they would even receive a new heart, which Jeremiah prophesied about. Daniel would have read that too because he was reading Jeremiah 31, the part about the return. There God promises that he will not only forgive and do away with the sins of Israel, but he will also send the Saviour who will give them a complete new life, a life in which they will love God from the heart and do his will. They will obey all his commandments, because these commands are good, and they know that they are good.

How much exactly Daniel understood of the work of Christ and the way in which Christ would pay for all our sins, we do not know. But it is important to note what Daniel says here in verse 16. "O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill." Daniel acknowledges that it is the righteous wrath of God that brought this disaster over Israel. But Daniel can also plead for God's mercy. In keeping with his righteousness, God can also turn away his anger and his wrath from Jerusalem and in this Daniel prophesies about the coming of the Messiah.

It is in keeping with God's righteousness, that he can forgive us our sins. His mercy and his justice are not opposed to each other. God does not need to ignore his righteousness to show his justice. No, in his justice **and** in his righteousness, he can show mercy to his people. That is because he shows mercy to his people in his Son Jesus Christ. He came to fully satisfy God's justice so that God in his righteousness can save his people.

Urgent prayer

In verse 18 and 19, Daniel's prayer becomes very urgent. He does not tell God in the first place that he should fulfil the promises which God gave to his people. Again Daniel realizes that he has nothing to call on. It is only God's mercy. But now he speaks about God's own honour, God's own Name. Jerusalem is not just the city of the Jews; it is the city that bears the Name of God. And Daniel beseeches God to listen and to forgive, to hear and to act, so that people would not mock God's Name due to the desolation of Jerusalem. He does not ask because otherwise it would be too late for his people, but because of God's Name. In verse 19 he says, "Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name."

It is similar to what Moses did when the Lord God told him that he would destroy Israel. In Exodus 32 after Israel made the golden calf, the LORD God said that he would destroy them and then make Moses into a great nation. But Moses sought the favour of the LORD his God, and said in verse 12, "Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth?'"

In the same way Daniel calls on God to act for the sake of his Name. What would the heathen people say if Israel was scattered forever among the nations of the earth and it would cease to exist? Then the heathen people would not only scorn the Israelites, but also their God, the God who was not able to defend his own city and his own temple. It is for the honour of his Name that God had chosen for himself a people, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." (1 Peter 2:9)

That is why God brought his people out of Egypt. That is why God also later brought his people back out of exile, in the same year that Daniel prayed this prayer. And that is why God gave his One and Only Son. He worked everlasting salvation so that everyone would praise him for his wonderful work of salvation. Everyone will have to acknowledge that God is God, and no one else is.

Daniel 9:20-27

In the verses 20-23 we read that God had sent Gabriel to bring the answer to Daniel's prayer. Daniel speaks about him as the man whom he saw in his vision (see 8:15, 16). As the answer to Daniel's prayer, Gabriel now gives him the explanation of the vision. He speaks about seventy weeks. Seventy weeks also means seventy sevens, which is 490 (see Leviticus 25:8, where we read about seven weeks of years, which is 49 years). So seventy weeks, or seventy sevens means 490 years. In the verses 25 – 27 these seventy sevens are again divided in smaller time periods. A time of seven sevens, which is 49 years. The going out of the word to restore Jerusalem is probably the command of Cyrus to the Jews to return to Jerusalem and build the temple. The translation in the ESV of this verse is very uncertain. If you read the NIV, you will see that there the time period between the moment that the word went out and the coming of the anointed one, is seven sevens (49 years) *plus* sixty two sevens (434 years). This is different from what the ESV gives, and it mainly is the result of a different punctuation. Seven sevens refers to the year of Jubilee, (after 49 years) in which every man was to receive back his inherited land and the slaves were to be set free. This seven weeks is therefore symbolic.

The 62 weeks are also symbolic. The 62 weeks and seven weeks are together 69, which means almost the time decreed in verse 24 about Daniel's people. According to the NIV it is then that the anointed one will come. During that time (the 69 weeks) the city will be rebuilt, but in times of trouble. Not in the glorious way it happened under Solomon.

The anointed one is important in achieving what is promised in verse 24: to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin. After the sixty-two weeks the anointed one will be cut off (ESV) or put to death (NIV) and shall have nothing. What these words (and shall have nothing) mean is unclear. It can be translated in many different ways. I can't go into detail here now. Then the city will be destroyed and the temple. But that will not be the end. War and violence will continue thereafter. The ruler who destroys the city shall make a strong covenant, which can be explained as: he will force an agreement upon the people.

The one seven in verse 27 is the last of the seventy sevens mentioned in verse 24. This will be the final time before the seventy sevens are fulfilled, the time in which the suffering of the people will come to a climax. There is much uncertainty about this prophecy, especially the last verse. We can recognize here the coming of the Lord Jesus, as the anointed one who will atone for the wickedness, who will be put to death, and also in that time the temple will be destroyed (as happened in the year 70 AD).

'Wing of abominations': the meaning of this is uncertain. It would not benefit us to discuss the various theories, as it wouldn't bring us much additional understanding.

'Until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.' Here again we read that God is in control and he will bring the desolator to his end and punish him with (pour out on him) God's wrath.

Questions

1. How much time do we spend in our prayers on confession of our sins? Can we learn from the prayer(s) of Daniel?

2. When we pray, do we focus mainly on ourselves or do we see ourselves as part of God's people? Do we pray for the need of God's entire people? See also the Lord's Prayer: does the Lord Jesus teach us to say 'me' or 'us'? What does that mean for us?
3. Why did Daniel include himself among the sinful people in his prayer? When we pray, do we accept responsibility for the sinfulness of the entire congregation?
4. John Bradford (1510-1555) was an English reformer and martyr. He made a habit of asking God to forgive him for the evils he saw in this world. Is this appropriate, or going too far?
5. Do we feel personally responsible if things go wrong in the church, or do we start criticizing all that is wrong, talking about the sins of others and about all that 'they' do wrong? How does Daniel speak about the sins of his people?
6. See verse 19: what is the focus of Daniel's prayer: the well-being of the people or the glory of God? What does this teach us about our prayer? What and how should we pray?

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