

DANIEL'S PRAYER FOR GOD'S MERCY

Daniel 9:1-27

Key Verse: 9:8,9

"O Lord, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you. The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him."

Daniel chapter 9 is a story about Daniel's Bible study and prayer. Through his Bible study, Daniel could understand what would happen to his people Israel, who had been captives for a long 70 years under the yoke of the Babylonian Empire. What did Daniel do when he understood that the glorious day of liberation was to come to his people? Did he have a party with his own native people? Did he write a front-page article for the Babylonian Tribune for the day of liberation? No! Let's see what he did. In the last part of chapter 9, the number 7 is repeated several times. This number is symbolic and also refers to Jesus' coming to judge evil and the fulfillment of prophecy concerning him. The number 7 is not such a fantastical assumption as many random Bible students emphasize.

I. Daniel's Bible study (1-3)

Look at verses 1,2. "In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom--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." These verses state that Daniel was in political turmoil. He came to Babylon at the time Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon. After Nebuchadnezzar he served Belshazzar, son of Nebuchadnezzar. Next he served Darius, the conqueror of Babylon. Probably the capital city of Babylonia was the best. So Darius came to establish his kingdom in Babylonia. In this period of political transition and turmoil most people did not know what they could do. They only despaired and complained and conspired to rebel. But Daniel sat down and studied the Bible. When he sat down and studied the Bible, the pictures of political turmoil and rebellion and treachery and killing and destruction all disappeared from his heart. Gradually, the revelation of God appeared in his heart. Daniel was not swayed by the situation of the world. Daniel did not expect a better world through a new king. He studied the Bible and meditated on it until the revelation of God came upon him. We have many things to study: the leg of a flea in biology, man's diseases in medicine, the complexity of a line in physics, man's fallen state in philosophy. From Daniel we learn that we must study the Bible in any situation.

Jesus showed us a good example of how to study the Bible. When he was

12 years old he went to Jerusalem at the Passover time. Even though the Passover festival was over, he remained there three more days and asked questions and answered questions sitting among the Bible teachers. When we study the life and works of Jesus, Jesus defeated Satan's temptations with the words of the Bible. Right before Jesus' public ministry, Satan came and said, "You gotta eat, don't you? I know you are hungry after fasting for 40 days. Omitting one meal is not a small matter. Why do you fast for 40 days?" Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Mt 4:4). What Jesus said is the universal truth to mankind. Man is both body and spirit. So man needs bread and spiritual bread. Recently, we could see that communists had enough bread and natural resources such as crude oil and tungsten, and inexpensive apartments and so on. Nevertheless, they were in great confusion and collapsed. They did not know why they collapsed. In light of the Bible they collapsed because they had no word of God.

Jesus' ministry on earth was not easy at all. When he delivered good news of great joy, people despised and rejected him and plotted to kill him. Even his family members wanted to kidnap him, thinking that he had gone too far (Mk 3:21). Jesus was not distressed amid persecution and affliction during the time of his earthly messianic ministry, because he knew what he was doing. He taught the Bible to the thronging crowd of people. He taught the Bible to his disciples. Sometimes Jesus taught the Bible to Mary one-to-one while Martha was busily cooking. Several days before his crucifixion, Jesus taught the Bible to people who came to observe the Passover. People rejected him and treated him like a useless stone. At that time there were many religious leaders who assumed that they were servants of God. They should have supported Jesus. To our surprise, they violently rejected Jesus and treated him like a rejected stone. The religious leaders had expected inwardly a political figure of a Messiah who would crush world power nations, especially the Roman Empire, and establish the earthly Messianic kingdom so that all the Jews might be the rulers of the world. But they saw that Jesus was nothing but a friend of tax collectors, eyes to the blind. Mainly Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God, in which they were not very interested. Jesus understood their rejection on the basis of the Bible and said in Mark 12:10, "Haven't you read this Scripture: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone'?"

When Paul worked hard, there were two kinds of people. The first were the Thessalonians. Even though they studied the Bible, they were violent and attacked Paul and hurt him. But the Bereans were different. Acts 17:11 says, "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." Those who study the Bible with joy are like a tree planted by the streams of water, which bears much fruit in season and whose leaves do

not wither. Whatever they do, they prosper (Ps 1:3). On the other hand, those who study the Bible reluctantly are the wicked. They are like chaff. They cannot join in the assembly of the righteous (Ps 1:4,5).

Daniel must have studied Jeremiah 25:11b, which predicted the liberation of Israel from Babylonian captivity after seventy years. Jeremiah 25:11b says, "...these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years."

The joy of liberation from captivity is expressed in Isaiah 40:1,2. It says, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

II. Daniel's prayer (4-19)

Seventy years of slave life in a foreign empire was not a short time. It had been a long time. Daniel had lived almost all of his life when his country was in a tragic situation. Therefore, his joy must have been extremely great at the prediction of the liberation. We heard about how the East German people were overjoyed to be liberated from the grip of communists. There has never been an example of political leaders giving up their political power to unite the nations. But East German leaders did. Many East German leaders gave up their powerful positions if only they could be liberated from communist control. I heard that the East Germans had a great celebration party week after week for many months. But what did Daniel do? Daniel did not go anywhere. Daniel did not go to his people to tell the good tidings. He came to God and prayed for God's mercy. The day of liberation was God's grace. But Daniel was a spiritual man, so he did not abuse God's grace. He wanted to maintain God's grace. This is the reason Daniel came to God in prayer. What did he pray to God?

First, Daniel confessed his sin and the sin of his people. Read verses 4-7. When he confessed the sin of his people, he said in verse 20, "my sin and the sin of my people." Daniel was an upright person in the sight of God. But he was not self-righteous. He didn't blame his people. He took up the responsibility of his people's sin and said, "my sin and the sin of my people." Truly, he has the image of our Lord Jesus, who took up our iniquities and transgressions in his body. Daniel took up his people's sin on himself and came to God and confessed the sin of his people. Daniel was truly a man of God who knew God personally. He knew that God is holy God Almighty. So he came to God first at a time of joy to ask God's mercy and forgiveness. He was a true shepherd of his people.

Daniel also confessed the sin of his forefathers and kings and princes (6b). One man's sin does not remain in himself. One man's sin

spreads, as Adam's sin spread over the whole world. Daniel knew that sin was a contagious disease that made his people very sick until they lost the privilege of being God's children and became children of sin and Satan.

Second, Daniel confessed their sin of disobedience against the command of God (4-6). God delivered his people through Moses out of bondage in Egypt and gave them the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai (Ex 20:1-17). God also gave them many other commands through his prophets. The Old Testament time was the time of prophecy, while the New Testament time is the time of grace. Among the Ten Commandments the first and fourth commandments might be the most important. The first commandment says, "You shall have no other gods before me," because God is the God who brought his people out of the land of slavery. The fourth commandment concerns the Sabbath, in which his people must worship God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their strength to renew a personal relationship with God. On the Sabbath they also must serve God's flock of sheep, who are in need. Therefore, the commandment to keep the Sabbath is the detailed instruction of how to worship God only. But when they lived in the promised land flowing with milk and honey they were gradually more interested in material things. So their Sabbath-keeping was nothing but one of their habitual rituals. They did not search the Bible. They did not worship God. They did not renew their personal relationship with God. Their worshiping God on the Sabbath became very superficial. They were very corrupt and worthless to God as a priestly nation. When they could not keep the first and fourth commandments, they could not keep the other eight commandments. The chosen people of God became like-third class Canaanite rock stars. When Daniel reviewed Israel's history, God Almighty was righteous. But his people were covered with shame--the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel.

Third, Daniel prayed, begging God's mercy and forgiveness (7-14). When Daniel saw his people, they were still too sinful to be clothed with God's mercy and forgiveness. His people were too wretched and crooked and perverted to be clothed with God's mercy and forgiveness. They were too crushed and smitten to be restored to be a priestly nation. But Daniel knew that God is holy and almighty God who punishes the sins of the fathers and each person's own sin as well. Daniel also knew that God is merciful and forgiving. So he depended on God's mercy and grace of forgiveness for his people to blot out the sin of his people and to consider them as his own people.

He also prayed that the curses and judgments written in the Law of Moses poured out on them because of their sins would be removed. The future curses and judgment would be so severe that nothing that had happened under heaven would rival what was done to Jerusalem. Daniel knew that they had been punished through captivity. Still, they were merely fallen men. So Daniel prayed, asking God's mercy and

forgiveness upon his people.

Fourth, Daniel prayed, remembering God's grace of deliverance. One servant of God saw many Korean old ladies in Germany suffering on the bottom of society as nurses' aides. They were like those who sell their youth for money, because they had no possibility of getting a permanent visa. So a servant of God brought around 30 of them back to Korea, taught them basic English, helped them study for the RN exam with the help of many doctors, and to get RN licenses. He also helped them to marry and buy houses. Then all of them ran away except one. They were treacherous people. Their basic problem was that they did not remember God's grace. Not only they, but we also are very treacherous and forgetful of God's grace. To remember God's grace is a most difficult spiritual battle.

Look at verse 15. "Now, O 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." Daniel prayed based on God's grace for his people. God, out of his great mercy, delivered them from slavery in Egypt. When they were in slavery they were smitten, broken and crushed. They were sentenced day after day to hard labor and whipping. Their children were also branded as slaves and possessions of their Egyptian masters. But God delivered them through his servant Moses and sent them to the promised land flowing with milk and honey to be his servants.

That was God's immeasurable grace. Did they remember his grace? No! They abandoned God and only enjoyed milk and honey in the promised land. In their material life they became like dancing members in the demons' carnival. Daniel could not ask God's mercy of forgiveness when he thought about his people's past sins. So he begged God's mercy and forgiveness, depending on God's grace of deliverance. Daniel also asked God's mercy for his people for God's own glory. Look at verse 17. "Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary." I believe at this point Daniel cried when he prayed, "Lord, look at the desolate sanctuary of your temple. Look at the desolation of the holy city Jerusalem." Sometimes we cannot pray when we forget God's grace showered upon us. But we can pray when we depend on God's grace. God's grace is that he gave his one and only Son as the Lamb of God to save us from our sins. We are saved by God's grace. If we don't remember God's grace, we are not saved. Theology or assumption cannot save man's soul.

III. The Anointed One (20-27)

While Daniel was speaking, praying and confessing his sin and the sin of his people Israel, the archangel Gabriel, whom he had seen in the earlier vision, came to him in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He said, "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight

and understanding" (22).

Look at verse 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." This part is the main point of this passage. It is the symbolic prophecy that seventy years of imprisonment were over and their sin was forgiven and the Most Holy and Anointed One would come. But the number "seventy 'sevens'" is a symbolic number and well-known number in the history of Israel. "Seventy 'sevens'" means $70 \times 7 = 490$. Literally, it means 490 days. But to the Israelites, figuratively speaking, it meant 490 years. For example, Moses sent 12 spies to spy out the promised land for 40 days. Ten of them gave a very negative report, implying that the land was good, but the people in the land of Canaan were heavyweights and the Israelites looked like grasshoppers in comparison. (Num 13:33) Scientifically speaking, a grasshopper cannot knock out a lion in a boxing match. The problem was that the ten spies had no faith in God. They discouraged his people until they wanted to go back to Egypt. So God punished his faithless people for 40 years, based on the 40 days of their exploration. In short, 40 days stood for 40 years. Likewise, 490 days were regarded as 490 years to the Jewish psyche.

It is interesting to observe the Jewish chronology. For example, from the time Abraham entered the land of Canaan to the time of liberation from slavery, the Israelites were in Egypt for 490 years. Abraham lived in Canaan for 60 years and his descendants lived as slaves in Egypt for 430 years. So $60 + 430 = 490$. From the time General Joshua led his people into the promised land until the first king Saul was anointed, passing through the time of Judges, were 490 years. After that, from the time the kingdom of Israel was established until his people sinned against God greatly and were dragged into Babylonia, 490 years passed. They say that from the time of liberation from Babylonian captivity to the coming of Jesus Christ were another 490 years. The number has no particular meaning except to represent God's long-suffering patience. This was the prophecy that they would be liberated after 70 years of slave life in Babylon and that the holy temple in Jerusalem would be restored. Most importantly, the Son of God would come as the Anointed One and would be crucified on the cross to save men from their sins.

Look at verse 26. "After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off 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." Even though the Son of God came and died for men's sins, it is not the end of the world. But someday the Son of God will stop all the abominations that cause desolation (27). In verse 27 he will confirm a covenant with many for one "seven." This has the spiritual meaning of

Jesus' completion of world salvation.

In this passage we learn what we can do in this troubled world. We must study the Bible until we can see the future history of God. We also must pray earnestly for God's grace of forgiveness for our sins. We must pray that God may make this nation a priestly nation.