Daniel 9:1-19

For Your Own Sake, LORD

*1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over
the realm of the Chaldeans— 2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the
number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass
before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.*

*3 Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting
and sackcloth and ashes. 4 I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord,
the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him
and keep his commandments, 5 we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and
rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. 6 We have not listened to your
servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to
all the people of the land. 7 To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at
this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are
near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the
treachery that they have committed against you. 8 To us, O Lord, belongs open shame, to our
kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. 9 To the Lord our
God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him 10 and have not obeyed the
voice of the Lord our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the
prophets. 11 All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice.
And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been
poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him. 12 He has confirmed his words, which
he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity.
For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against
Jerusalem. 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. 14 Therefore the Lord has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us, for
the Lord our God is righteous in all the works that he has done, and we have not obeyed his
voice. 15 And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a
mighty hand, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day, we have sinned, we have done
wickedly.*

*16 "O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from
your city Jerusalem, your holy hill, because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers,
Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us. 17 Now
therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your
own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. 18 O my God,
incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by
your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but
because of your great mercy. 19 O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act.*

Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name." – Daniel 9:1-19 ESV

This chapter opens with a second mention of Darius the Mede ruling over the kingdom of the Chaldeans. His name first appeared in Chapter 6 in reference to an earlier event in Daniel's life. He is the one who decreed that for 30 days all the citizens of his kingdom must pray to him alone. His fateful decision had been at the prompting of his counselors who were jealous of Daniel and hoping to eradicate him. They were the ones who suggested that the penalty for disobeying the king's order should be death by being fed to the lions.

There has been much debate as to the identity of Darius because no extra-biblical records contain any mention of a Babylonian or Medo-Persian king by that name. As was stated in our discussion of the events in chapter six, the simplest solution to this problem may lie in the meaning of the name "Darius." It is of Aramaic origin and translates as "lord." It was likely a title rather than a proper name. It seems that the author purposefully chose to leave out the name of the king involved in the story. He also provides scant details to help determine the date of the events recorded in this chapter. It is as if Darius was intended to represent all the "lords" who ruled over the kingdom of Babylon and, eventually, the Medo-Persian empire.

But regardless of who Darius was, the events recorded in this chapter most likely happened toward the end of Daniel's life when he was in his early 80s. Even in his later years, Daniel remained faithful to Yahweh. Somehow, he had received a copy of the letters that Jeremiah the prophet had written to the exiles living in Babylon. Jeremiah remained in Jerusalem but was commissioned by God to deliver a message to all those who had been taken captive by the Babylonians at the fall of Jerusalem. The letter was intended for "the elders, priests, prophets, and all the people who had been exiled to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar" (Jeremiah 29:1 NLT), and here is what it said:

> *This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says to all the captives he has exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem: "Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce. Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away! And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare."* – Jeremiah 29:4-7 NLT

Daniel had managed to get his hands on some of the correspondence between Jeremiah and the Hebrew people living in Babylon. It also seems apparent that he had access to some of Jeremiah's other writings. This faithful and aging servant of Yahweh remained uncompromised in his convictions despite his long tenure in the Babylonian administration. One of the reasons for his undiminished faith was that he stayed in touch with his God. He was obviously a man of prayer, but he was also a man of the Word. This chapter reveals that Daniel was reading from the writings of Jeremiah the prophet.

Under God's direction, Jeremiah had faithfully sent letters reminding the Israelites to make the most of their time in Babylon but to never forget that there would be an end to their exile. God had told Jeremiah that their period of suffering would last 70 years and then they would be restored to the land.

When Daniel penned the words of this chapter, the people of Israel had been in captivity for about 67 years. He had spent most of his adult life in Babylon and, upon reading the words of Jeremiah, he discovered that the fulfillment of God's promise was drawing near. But rather than sit back, Daniel prayed. What prompted this reaction was what he found written in Jeremiah's prophesy.

> *This is what the Lord says: "You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again. For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me. I will be found by you," says the Lord. "I will end your captivity and restore your fortunes. I will gather you out of the nations where I sent you and will bring you home again to your own land."* – Jeremiah 29:10-14 NLT

It seems likely that he also read Jeremiah's reaction when God commanded him to buy a field just before the Babylonians invaded Judah.

> *"O Sovereign Lord, you have told me to buy the field – paying good money for it before these witnesses – even though the city will soon be handed over to the Babylonians."* – Jeremiah 32:25 NLT

God's command made no sense to Jeremiah. It was a bad time to be investing in land but Jeremiah did as the Lord commanded because he understood God's unfailing love and believed that God would fulfill His promise to restore Israel to the land one day. Jeremiah's investment was based on God's integrity.

Daniel read the words of Jeremiah, and responded with prayer and fasting. His prayer was full of repentance on behalf of the people, and he included himself in their guilt. He appealed to God's mercy. He praised God for His unfailing love and unwavering commitment to keep His promises. He acknowledged that their restoration would have nothing to do with their own merit; it would be for God's sake and the honor of His name. Despite their years of rebellion and sin, God would forgive and restore them.

This entire chapter is reminiscent of the words God spoke at the dedication of the Temple that Solomon built for God's glory. Yahweh told them that if they failed to be faithful, He would bring punishment. But if they repented, He would restore them.

> *"Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land."* – 2 Chronicles 7:14 NLT

Now, centuries later, Daniel is reminded of God's promise of restoration and challenged by the need for humility, repentance, and prayer. So, he takes it upon himself to step up and do what God commanded. Even after all the decades of living in Babylon, Daniel longed to go home to Judah. Yet, he knew that God expected a change of heart among His people. Repentance must precede restoration.

Daniel was not bitter with God. He did not shake his fist in the face of God and demand an explanation or compensation for damages done. Instead, he openly confessed the sins of his people and justified God's actions.

> *"You have kept your word and done to us and our rulers exactly as you warned. Never has there been such a disaster as happened in Jerusalem. Every curse written against us in the Law of Moses has come true. Yet we have refused to seek mercy from the Lord our God by turning from our sins and recognizing his truth."* – Daniel 9:12-13 NLT

Despite their exile, the people of Israel remained defiant and unrepentant. But not Daniel. He loved to see God work and so he was ready to confess and call out for God's mercy. He reminds God of His previous rescue of the people from their captivity in Egypt. He believes that God can do it again but knows that God is waiting for His people to display repentant hearts. This leads Daniel to cry out, "O my God, lean down and listen to me. Open your eyes and see our despair. See how your city—the city that bears your name—lies in ruins. We make this plea, not because we deserve help, but because of your mercy" (Daniel 9:18 NLT).

He knew they didn't deserve God's favor, so he called on God to preserve the integrity of His own name. Daniel realized he was asking a lot but believed Yahweh to be a covenant-keeping God who always keeps His word.

Daniel 9:20-27

More Than Daniel Prayed For

[20] 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. [22] 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.

[24] "Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. [25] Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. [26] And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. [27] And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator." – Daniel 9:20-27 ESV

As a result of Daniel's prayer, God responded. He sent the angel Gabriel to provide Daniel with "insight and understanding." Gabriel told Daniel, "The moment you began praying, a command was given. And now I am here to tell you what it was, for you are very precious to God. Listen carefully so that you can understand the meaning of your vision" (Daniel 9:23 NLT). This was Daniel's second encounter with God's heavenly messenger and, this time, Gabriel proceeded to give Daniel insight into events surrounding the end times.

As Daniel listened intently, Gabriel outlined a chronological framework regarding the future of Jerusalem. Daniel did not know that his vision had long-term implications, dealing with events that would take place far into the future and involve the coming of the Messiah. As Daniel had read the writings of Jeremiah, he was reminded that God was about to restore Israel to the land after their 70 years of exile in Babylon. But God had far more in store for the nation of Israel.

He was going to restore peace and righteousness to the world with the return of His Son at the end of the age. The same God of mercy, grace, and forgiveness to whom Daniel prayed was the one who would fulfill all His promises regarding the end of the age and the coming of His Son's Eternal Kingdom.

Verse 24 contains the full outline of the prophecy.

> *"A period of seventy sets of seven has been decreed for your people and your holy city to finish their rebellion, to put an end to their sin, to atone for their guilt, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to confirm the prophetic vision, and to anoint the Most Holy Place." – Daniel 9:24 NLT*

The term "weeks" is better translated "sevens," thus Gabriel outlines a period of seventy sets of seven. Verse 25 describes a period of sixty-nine sevens and verse 26 describes what happens between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth seventh. Then verse 27 outlines the events surrounding the final seventieth-seventh. All this cryptic-sounding talk of weeks and numbers must have left Daniel's head spinning. He had no way of comprehending its meaning, but Gabriel made it clear that it all had to do the prophetic vision of Israel's future.

Daniel had just finished confessing the sins of his people and now Gabriel was letting him know that the day was coming when the rebellious Israelites would finish their rebellion. But this dramatic change in their behavior would not come because of their own effort but by the gracious hand of God. He would put an end to their sin, atone for their guilt, and usher in everlasting righteousness. The day was coming when God would do for the people of Israel what they could never have done for themselves.

The prophet Ezekiel recorded God's promise of this epic and future transformation in the lives of His chosen people.

> *"For I will gather you up from all the nations and bring you home again to your land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations. And you will live in Israel, the land I gave your ancestors long ago. You will be my people, and I will be your God."* – Ezekiel 36:24-28 NLT

God had great plans for the nation of Israel and for the world in general. In less than three years, He would orchestrate the return of a remnant of His people to the land of Israel, but that would be just the beginning of His master plan. Daniel was anxious to know that his people would be returning to Judah, but God wanted His faithful servant to understand that He had something far greater in store for them.

To make sense of this prophecy, it is essential to understand the seventy-sevens as referring to years and not weeks. When you consider that Daniel understood the prophecy of Jeremiah as dealing with a literal 70-year span in which the Israelites would be captives in Babylon, it only makes sense to see the seventy-sevens (490) as a period of years. With the fall the Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians, the city suffered under the hand of Gentiles for 70 years. In the same way, Jerusalem would have to endure another 490 years under Gentile rule.

In a way, Daniel was receiving a good news-bad news message. He had just been reminded that the 70 years of Babylonian captivity were about to come to an end; that was the good news. But now he was being told that another period of Gentile oppression was in Israel's future. Yet this prophesy is anything but clear. Daniel had no way of understanding the ramifications of what Gabriel was saying. When Gabriel said, "Now listen and understand," Daniel must have been expecting a detailed and precise explanation of his vision. But, instead, he heard, "Seven sets of seven plus sixty-two sets of seven will pass from the time the command is given to rebuild Jerusalem until a ruler—the Anointed One—comes. Jerusalem will be rebuilt with streets and strong defenses, despite the perilous times." (Daniel 9:25 NLT).

What did it all mean? When would it all take place? Daniel likely understood that Gabriel was speaking in terms of years and not weeks but nothing else would have made sense to him. Then, Gabriel added another confusing aspect to the vision.

> *"After this period of sixty-two sets of seven, the Anointed One will be killed, appearing to have accomplished nothing, and a ruler will arise whose armies will destroy the city and the Temple. The end will come with a flood, and war and its miseries are decreed from that time to the very end."* – Daniel 9:26 NLT

None of this would have sounded like good news to Daniel. Despite his experience with interpreting dreams, this explanation was far from encouraging. Destruction, floods, war, misery – none of this came across as favorable or faith-inducing. Then Gabriel described the cessation of the sacrificial system and the desecration of God's house. This would have been worse than anything Daniel had experienced six decades earlier. He had lived through the fall of Jerusalem and now he was being told that something far more devastating lay in Israel's future.

Daniel is told that after a period of 434 years, an "anointed one" will appear on the scene. This "prince" or ruler will rebuild Jerusalem and make a treaty with the people of Israel.

> *The ruler will make a treaty with the people for a period of one set of seven…* – Daniel 9:27 NLT

Midway through this seven-year treaty, this ruler will break his agreement and outlaw the sacrificial system. On top of that, he will desecrate the Temple of God by setting up a false God within the Holy of Holies. Jesus spoke of this very event.

> *"The day is coming when you will see what Daniel the prophet spoke about—the sacrilegious object that causes desecration standing in the Holy Place." (Reader, pay attention!)"* – Matthew 24:15 NLT

The apostle Paul also addressed this end times event when writing to the church in Thessalonica.

> *Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.* – 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 NLT

The apostle John was also given a vision of this as-yet-to-happen event which he recorded in the Book of Revelation.

> *People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?"*
>
> *The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. It was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.* – Revelation 13:5-8 NLT

When Daniel heard the words of Gabriel, he had no way of knowing the full extent of the vision's meaning. He didn't realize the significance of what he had seen and the long-term ramifications of its meaning and message. There were future events on the horizon that would dramatically alter the political, social, and religious landscape of the world – for eternity. God was going to return the exiles to the land of promise, but He had far greater things in store for His people and the nations of the world.

Daniel was not given a play-by-play explanation of the vision. He was not provided with a detailed timeline or the identities of any of the major players in the divine drama that would unfold in the future. God simply wanted Daniel to know that there was a plan in place, and it would happen on time and in just the way God had ordained.