

Daniel
Seventy Years & Seventy Weeks - Part 2
Daniel 9
November 3, 2019
Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

This week I read an article by Peter Colon entitled, "The Story of Richard Wurmbrand". Maybe you've heard something of Richard Wurmbrand's story. Colon writes this. In 1945, Romanian communists seized power and a million Russian troops poured into the country. A Jewish believer, who had become a Lutheran pastor, Pastor Wurmbrand ministered to oppressed countrymen while engaging in bold evangelism to the Russian soldiers. That same year, the year 1945, Richard and his wife, Sabina, were forced to attend the Congress of Cults organized by the Romanian communist government. About four thousand people attended this congress and the sessions were broadcast live across the country. Stalin was announced as the patron of this gathering. Under that kind of incredible pressure, many religious leaders from Romania took to the podium to praise communism, to announce their allegiance, their loyalty to the new regime. Some of them went so far as to essentially abandon their faith. Calvinists, Lutherans, and even Jewish rabbis all took turns speaking at this congress, groveling, and bootlicking to Stalin and to the communist regime. Finally, Sabina Wurmbrand could take it no longer. She turned to her husband, Richard, and she said this, "Go and wash this shame from the face of Christ." *"Go and wash this wash this shame from the face of Christ."*

Colon writes, Richard walked up to the podium and declared to the delegates, whose speeches were broadcast to the whole nation, that their duty was to glorify God and Jesus Christ alone. Shortly thereafter, he was kidnapped by the secret police and he spent the next fourteen years in prison, suffering horrific tortures, brutality. For three years, for example, he was kept in solitary confinement in a cell thirty feet beneath the ground. Among other things, during those days - those years, he was forced to sit erect with his eyes wide open and listen over and over and over again to the words, "Communism is good, Christianity is stupid - give up!" Sabina his wife was arrested as well. She spent three years in slave labor camps.

What motivated all of that suffering? What drove them? Well, in Daniel's prayer in Chapter 9, we learn that it was the same passion for the name and reputation of God that the Wurmbrands

exhibited, that drove Daniel's prayer and drove his desire for Israel to be restored to their land. In the end, his primary concern was the glory of God - just as it had been that night in 1945 when Sabina said to her husband, Richard, "Go and wash the shame from the face of Christ." It's that same passion for God and His glory that should drive our hearts as well and we see it so beautifully reflected here in Daniel 9. In Daniel 9, God reveals a sweeping, prophetic timeline of Israel's history - all the way from the time of Daniel, to the very end of the age. And He reveals that timeline in response to just one man's prayer - Daniel.

Now I've noted for you, the chapter unfolds in two parts. First of all, there is a prayer for the end of Israel's captivity from verses 1 to 19 and that's where we really find ourselves and where we'll conclude tonight. We begin by looking at the occasion of the prayer in verse 1 - notice it says, "In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans." The year, as we established in light of that, was the year 538 B.C. What was the reason for Daniel's prayer? Verse 2 says that "in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years." Jeremiah records very explicitly that this captivity of God's people would last seventy years in Jeremiah 25:11-12, in Jeremiah 29:10 - both make it very clear and straightforward.

The question is why? Why seventy years? I noted for you last time that in Israel's calendar, every seventh year was to be a sabbath year in which the land was not to be actively farmed. This was required by Leviticus 25. And so God, in response to their disobedience, had them outside the land for those seventy years to recapture the 490 years in which this had not been done. 2 Chronicles 36:20-21 says, "Those who had escaped from the sword he [Nebuchadnezzar] carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia," - notice this - "to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete."

You say, why? What was the point? Well the sabbath years were to be the testimony of God's people to their trust - not in their own ingenuity, not in their own efforts, not in their own

capacity to raise crops - but in God to care for them. So to skip the sabbath years was, in essence to say, our trust is not in God, our trust is in us. And so seventy years.

How exactly were these seventy years calculated? I noted for your last time. There are two primary views. One of them begins in the year 605, which was when the first captives, including Daniel, were taken from Babylon, or from Jerusalem I should say, to Babylon and then until the first year return in the year 536 or so B.C. The second way to calculate the seventy years is to begin them at the year 586, when the temple was destroyed, and then have the seventy years end when the rebuilding of the temple was completed in 516/515 B.C. That's how it's calculated.

Now, we looked last time not only the occasion of prayer, the reason for the prayer, but at the attitudes of prayer reflected in verse three. And if you weren't here, you can catch up. But just to mention them. There's a single-mindedness to Daniel's prayer. He's focused. He lifted his face toward God. There's faith, there's persistence, and there is humility.

We went on to consider the content of the prayer in verses 5 to 19. It begins with adoration in verse 4. Notice, "I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed and said, 'Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness [His steadfast love] for those who love Him and keep His commandments'". And then he moves on from adoration to the confession of sin in verses 5 to 14. Now I'm not going to go back through this, but just to remind you, that, there are within his confession these reminders of what true confession of sin looks like. You must identify its true nature. You must accept sin's just consequences. You must hope only in sin's remedy or in sin's only remedy. You must admit God's faithfulness in judgment. And then, you must cultivate a godly sorrow over sin. All of that is contained within the confession in verses 5 to 14. Now that's where we left off last time.

Tonight, we come to the third part of the content of Daniel's prayer. It is petition. Specifically, petition for forgiveness and restoration. That's verses 15 to 19. The focus so far in this prayer has been primarily on the confession of sin - his own sin and, especially, the sin of his people. But now he comes to the specific request that he has in mind. Notice verses 16 and verse 17. Verse 16, "O Lord...let now Your anger and Your wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem,

Your holy mountain", and then verse 17, "...for Your sake, O Lord, let Your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary."

Daniel essentially, here, makes two requests. First of all he asks God for the forgiveness of God's people. He asks God to turn away His wrath and anger. It's really a prayer for forgiveness - the forgiveness of sins. And if you doubt that, look down at verse 19. It's explicitly expressed, "O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive!"

Daniel's prayer, here, really comes from the prayer Solomon offered at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem. In fact, go back to 1 Kings. 1 Kings 8. Let me show you this. Daniel borrows so much of this chapter from other portions of Scripture that were already in existence when he wrote, when he prayed. 1 Kings 8 is one of those. It's Solomon's great prayer when the temple itself was dedicated. Look at verse 46, 1 Kings 8:46. Let's pick it up in the middle of this prayer of Solomon's. He says, "When they sin" - when Your people - "sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin) and You are angry with them and deliver them to an enemy, so that they take them away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near". Now notice this is explicitly the circumstance in which Daniel and the children of Israel find themselves. Verse 47, "if they take thought in the land where they have been taken captive, and repent and make supplication to You in the land of those who have taken them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and have committed iniquity, we have acted wickedly'; if they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who have taken them captive, and pray to You toward their land which You have given to their fathers, the city which You have chosen, and the house which I have built for Your name; then hear their prayer and their supplication in heaven Your dwelling place, and maintain their cause, and forgive Your people who have sinned against You and all their transgressions which they have transgressed against You, and make them objects of compassion before those who have taken them captive, that they may have compassion on them (for they are Your people and Your inheritance which You have brought forth from Egypt, from the midst of the iron furnace)".

So here Solomon says, if they truly repent and, by the way, if you want a description of what repentance from your sin looks like, you just work through that passage I just read. You walk

through the description that's there, of what it means to God for you to turn and repent. And anyone who will respond to God like that, God is always quick to hear, gracious to receive, and speedy to forgive. But, Solomon says, God if they repent, if they really repent, then forgive Your people - verse 50 - who have sinned against You. That's exactly what Daniel is praying in Daniel 9. "O, Lord, forgive...turn your anger and wrath away from Your people...forgive their sins".

But it's also a prayer for the restoration of Jerusalem and the temple. Go back to Daniel 9 and notice that Daniel specifically asks that God's wrath and anger be turned away, verse 16, from the city of Jerusalem, from Your city. Daniel reminds God that Jerusalem was, still is, and always will be - as long as this Earth remains - God's special city. Listen to 1 Kings. **This is** a really an amazing thought. 1 Kings 11:36, "Jerusalem", God says, is "the city where I have chosen for Myself to put My name." Jerusalem is the city which I have chosen for Myself to put My name. Some of us have the opportunity, in just a couple of weeks, to travel to Israel. We will end up in Jerusalem. Understand that that is not just another city. It is the place where God has chosen to place His name. It is the place where Abraham offered Isaac, his son, in Genesis 22. It's the place where David bought the threshing floor when the plague was stayed in the life of David. It's the place where our Lord taught, where, just outside the city there, the city wall, He was crucified and raised from the dead. It's the city where the gospel began at Pentecost. It is also the city to which Jesus, Himself, will return. He will put His feet, Zechariah says, on the Mount of Olives. And He will descend into the city of Jerusalem. God says, it is the city that I have called by My name. And Daniel reminds God of this. It's Your city. Notice verse 16 he says, it's "Your holy mountain [hill]". That refers to the part of Jerusalem called Mount Zion. It's the oldest part of the city. The part established under David. It included both the palace of the king and also the temple area as well. The city of Jerusalem, Your city, Your holy hill. And verse 17 also says, Lord restore the temple itself. Notice verse 17, "Your desolate sanctuary". That's the temple Nebuchadnezzar completely destroyed in the year 586 B.C.

Now this prayer of Daniel's fits perfectly what God had had promised through Jeremiah. God had said He would forgive them, He would restore them to their land, and Jerusalem and the temple would be restored. And so Daniel simply asked God to do what God has already

promised He would do - to forgive His people, to restore them to His favor, and restore them to their land. Those are his requests - the forgiveness of his people and the restoration of Jerusalem and the temple. And of course, that implied in that, is the restoration of God's people to the land.

Now, surrounding those two requests, on both sides of those two verses, Daniel lays out several arguments to God, as to why God should answer this prayer. I want you notice with me the six reasons, in verses 15 to 19, that Daniel gives God as to why God should answer this prayer. And, by the way, we are going to learn some important things about our own prayers before we're done this evening as well. So pay attention to what Daniel does here. He gives God six reasons.

First of all, he recites God's past redemption. Verse 15, "And now, O Lord our God, who have brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and have made a name for Yourself, as it is this day—we have sinned, we have been wicked." Daniel reminds God that He had redeemed His people from an even worse captivity than the Babylonian one. God had brought them out of Egypt, out of slavery, with a mighty hand, with the great plagues of Egypt. He made such a name for Himself in Egypt. In the 1400s B.C, that in the 500s, Daniel says, it's still talked about. It's still a topic for conversation. God had made such a name for Himself, by what He had done in Egypt, that people still remembered and marveled at the Jewish exodus, hundreds of years later. And Daniel is essentially implying this - *"God, You can do that again. You can rescue Your people yet again, in spite of their sin"*.

Understand what Daniel's doing here. For Daniel, God's deliverance of His people from Egypt was an act of salvation which fulfilled the promises that He had made to Abraham. And in so doing, He glorified His name in the site of all the nations. Listen to Isaiah 63:12-13. Speaking of our God, it says He "...caused His glorious arm to go [out] at the right hand of Moses, Who divided the waters before them to make" - talking about God here - "to make for Himself an everlasting name". Daniel argues that God should rescue His people yet again, based on His past redemption. *"God these are Your people, You redeemed them from Egypt. Don't abandon them now."*

A second reason that Daniel gives God for responding to his prayer, is God's perfect righteousness. Verse 16, "O Lord, in accordance with all Your righteous acts, let now Your anger and Your wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain". Notice that expression, "in accordance with all Your righteous acts". That implies a couple of things. It implies, first of all, on the negative side, that God's justice has now been completely satisfied and it's time for the captivity to end. In Isaiah 40:2, Isaiah anticipates this and he writes this, "Speak kindly to Jerusalem; And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, That her iniquity has been removed, That she has received of the Lord's hand, Double for all her sins." God's justice has been satisfied.

But, there's another idea with this righteous acts as well and I think its probably the predominant idea, and that is, God's righteousness, the fact that God always does what is right, demanded that He continue to be committed to His people and to their land because of His promises. He's saying, *"God, You have always done what is righteous. You have always done what is right. You have to do it now as well. And Your own character, and certainly Your promises demand that"*. After all, Daniel reminds Him, *"God it's Your city!"* Notice those pronouns. It's "Your" city. It's "Your" mountain. It's "Your" sanctuary. Leon Wood writes, "Daniel did not claim that God owed Israel deliverance, for the Israelites deserved only the punishment they were experiencing. One might paraphrase the thought" - this idea that in accordance with all your righteous acts he says - "One might paraphrase the thought according to Your righteous acts in history which included the gracious deliverance of Your undeserving people, do the same now."

A third reason that Daniel gave God for answering his prayer is God's people's reproach. Verse 16, "...for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people have become a reproach to all those around us." Think about the conclusions that the nations around Israel came to. If you lived in the ancient world, and you believe that all the gods - you were polytheistic so you believe that there were a lot of gods and you believe that the gods of the individual nations went to fight with the armies of that nation, if one nation defeated another nation in battle, what conclusion do you come to? That their gods are greater than the gods of the nation they defeated. That's exactly what Israel's enemies concluded. The gods of Babylon must have been more powerful than Yahweh, the god of Israel. As a result, the people shared the

same reproach that God, Himself, did. It's like, *"There you go, you believed in that god? He wasn't able to protect you."* And so it's a reproach both on God and on those who believed in Him, and had their confidence in Him.

But the real reason that they suffered, notice verse 16, was "because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers". God had punished them. It wasn't that God was weaker. It wasn't that He couldn't defeat Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon's gods. It was, by the way, by this time, he's already proven that right? They're gone. They're in the dustbin of history. Instead, it was because God, in His justice, had to deal with sin. So Daniel appeals to God on the basis of the reproach of His people.

The fourth reason he gives God, is God's personal reputation. And this is the primary reason behind Daniel's request. He's already hinted at it in verse 15 - it's Your people, You made a name for Yourself. Verse 16 - "Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain, Your people". And now Daniel makes this point explicitly in verse 17. "So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplications, and for Your sake, O Lord, let Your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary." "For Your sake" - he reminds God that the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple were not only a disgrace for God's people, which he just said, but also, for God Himself. He asks God to restore the temple for the sake of God's own honor and reputation. Notice how he words this request - "let your face shine". Literally in the Hebrew it's, "cause Your face" to shine on Your desolate sanctuary. That should recall another passage in the Old Testament - should recall Numbers 6:25, "The Lord make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you". Daniel asked God to cause His face to shine, or to radiate, on His own temple. In other words what he's really saying is, *"God, look on Your temple with good will and favor. Raise it from the ashes."*

The temple had been desolate, deserted, abandoned for more than fifty years. Just think about that. Think about history. Think about what's happened in the last fifty years. For fifty years, the temple in Jerusalem had been rubble and completely deserted, overgrown, abandoned. And Daniel says, *"O God, for Your own sake, for the sake of Your glory, for the sake of Your name, act!"*

Verse 18, "O my God, incline Your ear and hear! Open Your eyes and see our desolations". By the way, plural there - the "desolations" in plural - has the idea of intensity. *"Look at how intense the desolation we're experiencing is and the city which is called by Your name"*. Again the Hebrew here is very expressive. The word "incline" is literally "turn or bend" Your ear - *"Turn or bend Your ear to listen to what I'm saying God"*. "...and the city which is called by Your name" is, literally, the city upon which Your name is called.

Daniel's prayer reaches a kind of crescendo in the next verse. It comes in short bursts, filled with emotion and pathos. In fact, in verse 19, three times in one verse he cries out, "O Lord". Look at verse 19. "O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action!" He says, *"Forgive us and act!"* Why? He goes on to say, verse 19, "For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name." Daniel argued that God needed to act quickly to bring Israel's captivity to an end because every day that Jerusalem and the temple lay in ruins, every day that God's people continued to live in exile, in captivity, it brought more shame to Israel's God. It's interesting isn't it? That God is willing, in order to accomplish His own purposes with His own people, to allow that to happen. It says a lot about God. It says that while His concern is for His glory, He is willing, for a time, to allow that glory to be tarnished, in order to accomplish His love and compassion for His people, to do the work in their lives that needs to be done.

You see it with Christ right? Christ was willing to become one of us, to enter this world, in order to accomplish the great purpose of redemption. He humbled Himself for thirty-three years, lived among us as one of us, was shamed. I mean, think about all the shame that Jesus endured. I mean, He's born in a situation in which His entire life, people raised the question about His the legitimacy of His birth. Then you have His own family. His brothers, his four brothers said He was out of His mind. Then the religious leaders of the nation, said He was a glutton, a drunkard, in league with Satan himself - that the things He did were simply through the power of Satan. And on and on the list goes. And yet He endured all of that, suffering the shame that went with that, the derision of His glory, why? For us. For His people.

God does that here. And yet people misunderstood. I love the quote from Dale Ralph Davis. Listen to this. "Daniel appeals to Yahweh's reputation. Of course, the Lord 'ruined' his own reputation when He 'gave' Judah's king and temple vessels into Nebuchadnezzar's control [back in Chapter 1]. It was part of His judgment on Judah, but, as so often, the media didn't get it right. The popular interpretation was that Yahweh was simply another little-league deity, unable to keep his provincial people from being steamrolled by mighty Babylon and her victorious gods, Marduke and Nebo - Babylon's helps in ages past, their hopes for years to come. Yahweh seemed to be just another poor choice in the world's cafeteria of divine also-rans. Daniel pleads with Yahweh to reverse all of this and to restore His own reputation and 'name'." And then Davis ends this way, "Genuine believers always have this concern close to their hearts." If you're a genuine believer in God, if you have come to embrace and love His Son, then your heart beats with a passion for the glory of God. Daniel pled with God to act, to forgive, to restore for God's own reputation and glory.

A fifth reason that he gave was God's profound compassion. Verse 18, "...for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion." He says, "*God, You ought to act because it's just like You! It's in keeping with Your compassion to do so.*" The reason folks, that we ask God to act on our behalf or on behalf of others, is never our own merits. It's never because we have earned it. Rather, the basis of our appeal is always God's great, profound compassion. "*God I ask You to do this because it's Your nature to show compassion and I desperately need Your compassion.*"

The sixth reason that Daniel prayed was because he understood - in a sense he's arguing through this whole passage - God's primary method, that is that God uses means. I mean think about this for a moment. Why did Daniel pray about this when he knew, from Jeremiah, that God had promised the Babylonian captivity would only last seventy years and the time was almost up? Why did he pray? Why wouldn't he just wait? It's because Daniel understood that God not only decides the ends, but He also decides the means. Now let's admit that God can and sometimes does act alone, directly, without the use of any means at all. When He does that, what do we call it? A? A miracle. And God can do that. He's God. But that's not God's primary method of

accomplishing His purposes. Listen carefully. God's primary method of accomplishing His purposes is the use of ordinary means - most of the time.

For example, let's just talk about everyday life. God had promised to care for your needs, your physical needs, and for mine as well. Now can God do that without the use of means? Well of course He can, He's God! I mean think about it. God provided for the Israelites in the desert - water out of a rock! He caused the clothes and the shoes of the Israelites in the wilderness not to wear for forty years. It's my prayer right now, while I've got a couple of kids in university. He brought bread from heaven. But is that how God ordinarily provides for the needs of His people? No. Of course not. He ordinarily meets our needs how? Through the ordinary use, or I should say, the use of ordinary means.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:12 Paul writes, "Now...we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus...to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread." Work and eat. God says, *"I'm going to provide for you. I promised I would and here's how I'm going to provide for you. You're going to work, and you're going to get money, that you can buy food, and you can eat."* That's God provision for you. That's what God does. He normally uses ordinary means. In fact, in that same letter, Paul said the one who doesn't work shouldn't what? Eat. So that's God's ordinary means.

God normally uses ordinary means to accomplish His purposes. As Daniel read Jeremiah's prophecy he understood that God had not only declared the ends, literally, the end of the Babylonian captivity after seventy years that He would free His people from exile, but He also declared the means that He would use. Go back to Jeremiah. Jeremiah 29. I pointed this out a little bit last time but I want you to see it again in this context. Jeremiah 29:10. Now remember Jeremiah was a slightly older contemporary of Daniel. And so Daniel is reading the book that Jeremiah wrote and this is what he comes across. Jeremiah 29:10, "For thus says the Lord, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place' - back to the land. "For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then' - notice this, verse 12 - "Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. I will

be found by you,' declares the Lord, 'and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,' declares the Lord, 'and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.'" You see what Jeremiah writes?

Jeremiah says that God would accomplish His sovereign, eternal purpose of restoring His people from Babylonian captivity to their own land, by answering the prayers of His people. So God had a great, eternal plan. And how was He going to accomplish that? What were the means God would use? It would be in answering the prayers of His people.

So Daniel prayed. Perhaps, I mean we can't know this for sure but, it is interesting that in the prophecy it doesn't say when the seventy years begins, right? So Daniel is - I showed you a couple of ways that could be calculated. So maybe, and this is just sort of sanctified imagination, but maybe Daniel was praying, "*Lord, let the seventy years begin in 605 and not 597*" - when the second return of Nebuchadnezzar took place or - "*Lord, definitely not 586*". But Daniel primarily prayed because God had encouraged His people to pray about the end of the captivity in Jeremiah's prophecy. Because God intended to use the means of answering the prayers of His people to accomplish the ends - their freedom. In his study of Jeremiah, Daniel saw that God had promised the specific duration of their captivity - seventy years. He therefore took it as his responsibility to ask the Lord to fulfill His promise. Don't miss this. God's prearranged means, to accomplish His sovereign purpose, was through the prayers of His people, including Daniel.

This is truly remarkable. And there is so much, here, about our prayers. In fact, I want to take our remaining time to draw out for you several crucial lessons about prayer from this passage. And let's just admit that it's a bit surprising to find these lessons coming from Daniel. Not because of his character - he was a spiritual man who prayed often. But just step back for a moment and think about this. Who would've thought that a career politician, who had served in two great world empires, under four different kings, would teach us how to pray? But he does. And so what are the lessons about prayer we learn from this extraordinary man that God had raised up? And, ultimately, the lessons are not about Daniel. The lessons are about our God. As with every story, on every page of the Bible, the hero is never the human being. The hero is always God. So what are the lessons about prayer?

Lesson number one. There is a symbiotic relationship between divine sovereignty and our prayers. They fit together. They fit together. I mean, think about the this. And I get this question quite often. *"Tom, okay I grew up in a very Armenian setting. I grew up where man was in charge and now I get it. God is in charge, He rules all things. But, help me with this - if God is sovereign in the events that happen in all our lives, if He's already determined all the details, if He's already decided whom He will save, for example, then why pray?"* It's because God not only decides the ends, but the means that He will use to accomplish those ends. And the means God uses to accomplish His ends are almost always ordinary. Not miraculous but ordinary. God may have chosen to save one of your family members or one of your loved ones in eternity passed. I can't tell you whether He did or not. But He may have done that. And if He did, He may have decided to save them in answer to your prayer for their soul - just like He sent the children of Israel back to their land in answer to the prayers of Daniel - even though He had determined to do so.

Scripture is full of examples of God accomplishing His sovereign will in response to the prayers of His people. Think of it this way. When you pray, when you ask God to act, it may be that that triggers the very plan of God, that He determined in eternity past, to accomplish something, but to do so in answer to your prayer. This is why we pray. There is a symbiotic relationship. They fit perfectly together, divine sovereignty and human prayer, because God decides the ends, but He also decides the means and they're almost always ordinary. The simple prayer of His people is one of those means.

Secondly, we learn that our prayers should primarily grow out of our study of Scripture and in response to God's promises in the Scripture. Sinclair Ferguson writes of this passage, "Prayer asks in unwavering trust for what God has already promised to do". Do you base your prayers on the Scripture, on the promises of God in Scripture? Prayer addresses God and simply says, *"Father, you promised, you promised."* I find myself doing this so often. I did it tonight. I do it every Sunday. On early Sunday morning I get up, and I'm in my study at home, and I'm sorting through my notes and marking my notes, and I'm praying. And my prayer, almost every Sunday, includes something like this, *"Lord, You have said that it is Your will and purpose to use the gathering of the church, to use the giftedness that You have given the elders of the church to*

build up and edify the believers who hear the Word taught. I know that's Your purpose and I'm asking You, O God, to do that through me today, and through the other elders of this church, through the others who teach." I can pray that, knowing that I am praying on the promises that God has - on the statements of God. He's given the church men to this end. So I'm praying in keeping with God has said. *"Father, You promised!"* is essentially what I'm saying. And you can pray in the same way. Let the Scriptures, let the promises of God frame up your prayers.

For example, I'll give you another example that I wish weren't frequent in my life, but it is frequent just as it is in yours, and that is when we have sinned and we come to God seeking forgiveness. How do you come to God seeking forgiveness? Well you ought to come taking hold of the promises in Scripture. *"God, You have said that You are good and ready to forgive and that Your steadfast love is abounding to those who fear Your name. Here I am Lord, taking hold of that promise. My only hope is that what You said is true and that that is Your character."* Exodus 34, God says I am a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. I can't tell you how often I've come to God and said, *"God, my hope is that this is who You said You are! You are characterized as a god forgives who iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that's the only claim I have because if You treated me like I deserve, You would obliterate me. If I were God I would've, long ago, struck down such a rebel. But here I am, claiming Your character and Your promises."* This is how we are to pray. Our prayers should primarily grow out of study of the Scripture and in response to God's promises in Scripture.

Another important lesson from Daniel's prayer is that we should present our requests to God with arguments for Him to consider, especially biblical arguments. Now don't misunderstand. It's not that we try to manipulate God. It's not that we try to use our arguments as leverage to force God to do what we want - no! Rather, when we present our arguments like Daniel did, we are simply expressing our thinking in our hearts. We are saying, *"God, I'm asking You to do this and here's why."* When you pray, do you do this? Do you present arguments to God, with your requests - arguments like His past acts? *"God do this in light of what You have done in the past with Your people. I've read in the Scripture - You did this with Abraham, You did this with David. Lord, respond to me that way. Lord, I realize..."* - some of you are reading the Heart of Christ that I

recommended Thomas Goodwin's book. *"Lord I realize that You are the same toward me today as You treated those disciples when You were here. So respond to me like You responded to Peter. Or respond to me like responded to John.* His past acts. Plead His perfect righteousness - *"God, I'm asking You to do this because You are a God of perfect justice and righteousness and this is right based on Your Word.* Present the argument of His people's reproach - *"God, consider how Your people are being treated."* His personal reputation - *"God, do this for Your own sake, for Your glory, for Your honor."* His profound compassion - *"Lord, You are compassionate and gracious. That is Your nature. Hear my cry!"* His primary method is to use means - *"Lord, You use means to meet our needs. Use my work on this project that I've been asked to do in order to meet my needs and allow me not only to serve my family, but to contribute towards the needs of Your kingdom."* So present your requests to God with arguments for Him to consider.

Number four - biblical praying is often directed toward human needs but is always God-centered. Look again at verse 19. *"O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name."* When you come, even to deal with human needs, to ask God to do something that you need or someone you love needs, this is your appeal - *"God, do it for Your Name's sake. Do it because this person is called by Your Name."* - not demanding, but requesting.

This is the same spirit, by the way, that should be behind when we say what our Lord taught us to say in Luke 22:42, *"Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."* That's how we come - *"Lord"* - you heard me pray that tonight for some of the physical needs of people in our church - *"Lord, this is we want You to, this is what we want You to do, this is how we want You to respond, but we bow our wills to Yours because You have a greater plan, and so we accept that plan."*

And then number five. Learn from this example of Daniel 9, that God always hears the prayers of His people. Look at verse 20 - and we'll consider this text next time - but look at verse 20 of Daniel 9. *"Now while I was speaking and praying"*. Notice the word while - while I was praying. Verse 21, *"while I was still speaking in prayer...Gabriel"* came. Verse 23, Gabriel says

to Daniel, "At the beginning". I love that word. "At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued..." Listen, do you want understand that God hears your prayer if you're a believer in Jesus Christ? He hears. He always hears because you are His child and He is not like earthly fathers who are sometimes distracted. He is always attentive and attuned to the concerns of His people. 1 Peter 5:7 says, "casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." If it's a concern to you, it's a care to Him. I love Psalm 34:17, "The righteous cry, and the Lord hears". You believe that? Do you believe that if are righteous, by the righteousness of Jesus Christ, if you believe in God's Son, if you know God through His Son, then when you cry the Lord listens! He hears. And he goes on to say, "And delivers them out of all their troubles." He doesn't always deliver us out of our troubles in our time and in our way, but He always delivers us out of all of our troubles. It may be at the end of life when we're ushered into His presence, but He does hear, He does respond, and He will, in His own time, deliver us out of all of our troubles. Psalm 145:19, "He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and will save them." I hope, if you missed everything else from tonight's lesson, you'll get the this - prayer matters. Because if you're in Christ, when you cry out, your Father always hears.

Let's pray together.

Father we are overwhelmed by Your goodness, that we who are sinful, who are completely unworthy of Your mercy and grace, so constantly are the recipients of it. Father, we praise You for what we've seen and studied tonight. Forgive us Father for our prayerlessness. Forgive us for our lack of belief - Lord that we have simply not believed You when you've said that, when the righteous cry, You hear. O God help us to wipe away that unbelief, to confess it as sin, and to seek Your face even as Daniel did. Lord, You are good. You are generous. You are gracious. And even now, in our hearts, as we lift up our voices to You and our hearts to You, we trust that You are hearing us, and that You will respond in Your time and in Your way. Lord, again, I pray tonight that You would take what we've studied and You would do exactly what You have promised to do. That You would use Your Word in all of our hearts to conform us more to the image of Christ. He was a man of prayer. Father make us men and women of prayer. And Father I pray that You would help us to trust You, to believe You, to cry out to You, to present

our arguments, to present our case, to present our prayers. And then to trust You to work in Your time and in Your way. Thank you, O God, that when the righteous cry, You always hear. We praise You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.