

## **DANIEL 9      CBC 10.1.2021**

Welcome back to the book of Daniel! We're looking at ch.9, and we'll read the chapter as we go along (**so please have your Bible open. And please read chs.10-12 before next Sunday!**). As ch.9 begins, Daniel's life has been thrown into confusion by circumstances beyond his control. We know how that feels, with Covid! We can say, in the old Star Trek phrase, *"It's life Jim, but not as we know it!"*

It was the same for Daniel. v.1 tells us that he's writing *In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom.* The Babylonian kingdom in which Daniel had been a captive for 70 years has suddenly collapsed and now he's living under a new master, Darius the Mede. Overnight there's a new world empire. A new culture to get used to. New rules every day. New threats (it was this huge social change that led directly to Daniel being thrown into the lions' den, ch.6). A lot to take in for someone in his mid-eighties. It's life – but not as Daniel has known it.

And what does Daniel do in this crisis? What he's always done. He immerses himself in his Bible (v.2) and in prayer (v.3) – and we'll read those verses in a moment. But just let the idea sink in. *"Daniel, the world's in crisis and you're having your Quiet Time??"* Of course! Why not? Daniel knows that when you're being hit by big waves, you'll be tossed all over the place if you're not anchored.

And God gives us an anchorage in Him by His word and by prayer. The waves will still buffet you but you don't have to be left grounded on the beach or dashed on the rocks. The old chorus says, *"Read your Bible, pray every day, if you want to grow"* - that's still true! That's the way to Christian stability, and Daniel knew it.

Has the old idea of a daily Quiet Time become deadly dull and boring for you? Then let me ask you about your frame of mind when you approach God. Think about the story Jesus told of a Pharisee and a tax-collector going to the temple to pray (read Lk 18:9-14 if you need to refresh your memory):

- The Pharisee's mindset? I don't really need God. I'm not hungry for Him.
- The tax-collector? I'm devastated by my sin. I need to meet my Saviour. Whatever the difficulties of my life, my *heart* needs fixing more than my circumstances!

Daniel approaches God the way the tax-collector did. Even though he's one of the godliest people in the Bible, he's appalled at the sin that remains in his heart and he knows only God can rescue him. So he comes to God hungry, and his Quiet Time is dynamic!

**a) He takes SCRIPTURE seriously. v.2** *in the first year of [Darius'] 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.* He's reading Jer 25 and 29 and realizes that God decreed 70 years of exile in Babylon and the time is almost up!

**b) And because he reads His Bible believingly, it leads him to PRAY seriously. v.3** *So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.*

Note: Daniel didn't say, *"Well, if God is going to restore His city, there's no need for me to do anything."* God's sovereign purposes are never revealed in Scripture as excuses for idleness, but as incentives for action. So Daniel he prays.

**c) And what a prayer, because he takes GOD seriously! 4** *I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: 'Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments,*

**d) And because Daniel takes God seriously, he's no choice but to take SIN seriously.** That's why he fasts, and wears sackcloth and ashes (v.3), and prays one of the most moving prayers of confession in the Bible: **5** ***WE** have sinned – Daniel is one of the most godly men in Scripture but he doesn't imagine sin is somebody else's problem. He sees the subtlety and depth of sin in his own heart and he lays it bear by ransacking his 'sin' vocabulary: 5 We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. 6 We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.*

And Daniel continues:

**7** *'Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame – the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. 8 We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, LORD, because we have sinned against you. 9 The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him; 10 we have not obeyed the LORD our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets. 11 All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you. "Great is Thy faithfulness! - in judgement too."*

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

Do you ever confess like that? With this intensity and seriousness? You might say, "Why all this guilt inducing stuff?" Certainly it's very wrong to manipulate people with false guilt. But the Bible addresses the problem of REAL guilt that's unacknowledged. Think about it: when someone has wronged you and won't admit it and apologize – what does that do to the relationship?

I'll let you into a secret. I've been blessed to be married twice, to women who were united in godliness but in many ways very different people. But here's something they have in common. When I've wronged them, they both have appreciated an apology. An apology changes the atmosphere. Perhaps you've noticed that in your relationships!

Well, Daniel 9 is an apology to God. And it changes things.

**e) So having taken his sin seriously, Daniel also takes God's MERCY seriously, and God's ability to HELP:**

**15** *'Now, Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong. 16 Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts,*

*turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.*

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

## **Do you pray like that?**

- “Lord, we’ve got many needs, but our greatest need is that Your Name should be honoured among us! That You would deal with our sinful hearts, and cause us to walk in Your ways so that the nations would know what a great God you are!”
- It’s striking that there’s no mention of lions! No doubt Daniel prayed about them too. But what’s recorded is that he prayed the way Jesus taught us in the Lord’s Prayer: *“First and foremost, Your Name be honoured! Your Kingdom come! ... and oh yes, we need daily bread too.”*
- God’s word gives us God’s agenda. It exposes the crisis beneath the crisis. Daniel says, “O God, my biggest problem is not my circumstances. It’s not these new government rules that are making my life difficult. It’s my HEART – the sin that still lives inside of me (and in the rest of your people too). But Your word promises restoration. Won’t you do that in our lives, for the glory of Your Name?”

Imagine if we prayed like that as a church ... in Corsham ... across the UK. What might happen in 2021 if every one of us was more devastated by our sin than by our circumstances – if we confessed to God the ways in which we’ve failed – if we pleaded for His glory to be seen in us again? What might God do? Wouldn’t He show us mercy? That’s what He promises again and again in His Word.

**Look how God responds to Daniel’s prayer.** Even while Daniel’s prayer was going up, the answer was already speeding down. If you’re seriously praying for forgiveness, the answer comes quickly.

*20 While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for his holy hill – 21 while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. 22 He instructed me and said to me, ‘Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. 23 As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the word and understand the vision:*

NOW: Daniel wasn’t just a reader of Scripture (which we all are), but a writer of Scripture (which we are not). And he was given further revelation – and through him, we’re given that same revelation. It’s found in vv.24-27, and it’s God’s response to Daniel’s confession of sin and his plea for help, but it’s for us too. And though some parts are difficult to understand, this is God’s word for our comfort, so let’s read it:

*24 'Seventy "sevens" are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place. 25 'Know and understand this: from the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven "sevens", and sixty-two "sevens". It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. 26 After the sixty-two "sevens", the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: war will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. 27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one "seven". In the middle of the "seven" he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.'*

These verses have given rise to all sorts of interpretations and speculations, and if you want to explore them in more detail I'll recommend the commentary by Dale Ralph Davis as a good starting point. But if you want to pursue that, you'll need to do so with a humble and gentle heart! Some people become so worked up over the debatable issues that they miss the joy of what's clear – and that's foolish.

**So here are some things that are clear, and in which we can rejoice:**

- God has a plan! v.24 "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed" (cf. "decreed" in v.26 and v.27). History is a story with a wonderful Author, and the panorama of history is written on God's wall-calendar. That's good news when life seems chaotic.
- NOW: God's plan isn't quick from our point of view. Daniel thinks, "70 years and then it's over!" God says, not 70 but 70 x 7! Seventy years to return to Jerusalem, BUT God's plan to restore His people is bigger than that, and takes much longer. We aren't told how long, because the "sevens" aren't defined. But though God's plan isn't quick, it's definite! Decreed! There's a day when it will be complete and perfect (seven, after all, is the number of completion and perfection in Scripture).
- So history is a story with an Author. And there are chapters of various lengths: e.g., 7 sevens (v.25), 62 sevens (v.26), 1 seven (v.27). And the story includes trouble and opposition along the way – v.26 speaks of war, destruction, desolations.
- But by the end of the 70 sevens that are decreed, God will have accomplished six wonderful things for His people. They're clearly stated in v.24, and they answer Daniel's plea for mercy perfectly! God will (v.24)
  - finish transgression;
  - put an end to sin;
  - atone for wickedness (**note that God deals with sin finally and fully in all of its guises**);
  - bring in everlasting righteousness
  - seal up vision and prophecy (which means to bring it to fulfilment)
  - and anoint the Most Holy Place (which is a reference to what the High Priest did to come into the presence of God). That's what God tells Daniel He'll do for His people.

Do you see what is God doing? Giving Daniel another glimpse of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ! It's His work that does v.24: He finishes transgression, He puts an end to sin, He atones for wickedness, because He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29). He buries our sins completely by His death on the cross. He brings in everlasting righteousness! He fulfils all the visions and prophecies! And He brings us into the most Holy Place by His blood. And surely that's something we can rejoice in even if we don't understand all the details of the timetable!

*"My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought,*

*My sin, not in part, but the whole,*

*Is nailed to His cross – and I bear it no more!*

*Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!"*

That doesn't answer every question about this passage. Does it all relate to Christ's first coming only, or does it include His second coming? Christians have different views. But whatever your view of that, God answers Daniel's prayer in a way that's far above all Daniel asked or imagined.

Daniel asks for mercy, and God reveals a greater mercy than Daniel ever dreamed of. Daniel says, *"Our sins are so many!"* God replies, *"My mercy is more! I have a plan to do away with sin completely."* And when everything is wrapped up, we won't just be restored to Jerusalem which is temporary; we'll be restored to Jesus who is eternal. And instead of a world ruled by terrifying beasts, there'll be everlasting righteousness.

## **CONCLUSION**

Brothers and sisters: You may go to God with relatively small thoughts in your mind about forgiveness – God says I'll give you that, but I'll also give you infinitely more. I'll give you riches in Christ you've never dreamed of. We set our sights too low. We come into God's presence content with small things, and haven't grasped that God has so much more.

WELL: Aren't you glad Daniel didn't stop having his Quiet Time just because the world was chaotic? And doesn't it make you hungry to get serious with this awesome God in your Quiet Times too?

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, though our sins are many, your mercy is more. As storms rage around us and within, open our eyes to see your mercy and grace abounding to us in Jesus, and draw us by your Holy Spirit to seek you constantly in your word and in prayer. May the quality of our lives bring honour to your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION**

- How are you currently responding to God in the midst of life's struggles?
- How does God's grace to you in Christ encourage you to come to Him every day?