

Lessons from Daniel 9

By Ekkehardt Mueller

When employees want to achieve something with their supervisors, they have a number of options: file a petition, collect signatures, curry favor with the supervisors, or even threaten or bribe them. Daniel uses a different approach with God. He prays. He speaks openly with the Lord.

I. Structure of the Chapter

- *Prologue* (v. 1)
- *Daniel's Study of Scripture* (v. 2)
- *Daniel's Prayer* (vv. 3–19)
 - Confession of sins (vv. 3–14)
 - Request for restoration of Jerusalem and the temple (vv. 15–19)
- *God's Reaction* (vv. 20–27)
 - Gabriel's appearance (vv. 20–22a)
 - Gabriel's speech (vv. 22b–27)
 - Connection to the previous chapter (v. 22b)
 - Appreciation of Daniel as a person (v. 23)
 - The seventy weeks for Israel (vv. 24–27)

II. Survey of the Chapter

While the chapter is cast in a narrative framework and contains insights into the practical life of a believer—specifically about how to relate to God—it also contains one of the most fascinating biblical prophecies.

III. Discussion of the Chapter

1. Prologue

v. 1 With Daniel 9 we have come to the time of the Medes and Persians. For years Daniel had thought about the previous chapter (Dan 8), especially the time element that he could not understand.

2. Daniel's Study of Scripture and Prayer

vv. 2–3 People choose different ways to find answers to important questions regarding life and the future. They may read the horoscope, consult astrology, get involved in occultism and spiritualism, look for scientific explanations, consult with friends and experts, or turn to God through prayer and the study of His Word. Daniel chooses the best option: he studies Scripture. When the prophet Jeremiah talked about the Babylonian exile of the Southern Kingdom (Judah), he referred to the exile's duration of seventy literal years (Jer 29:10). This period was coming to an end, and the disobedience of the people of God may have had Daniel wondering whether this time would be prolonged by the 2,300 evenings and mornings of Daniel 8:14. So he fasts and prays for clarification and understanding from God.

vv. 4–14 The first part of the prayer consists of a request for forgiveness of sin.

Which sins are mentioned?

- Apostasy from the true God
- Disobedience vis-à-vis God's commandments
- Disobedience vis-à-vis God's messengers
- No confession of sins and turning toward God
- Disregard of the truth

Sin needs to be taken seriously because typically the consequences are unavoidable. Daniel includes himself with his people in this prayer and does not distance himself from them—although he is not portrayed in Scripture as being disobedient and having turned away from God. He does not consider himself better than others, knowing that all people are sinners and dependent on God’s grace.

How is God presented in Daniel’s prayer?

- God is great and awesome.
- In his love He maintains His covenant with His people, including promises (blessings or curses).
- He is just and righteous.
- He is merciful and ready to forgive sins.

vv. 15–19 Daniel turns to God with his petition for the restoration of Jerusalem and the temple. He appeals to God’s honor and reputation (“for your own sake”). Verse 18b sounds very much like Paul (Rom 3:23–24; Eph 2:8–9), stressing that there is no human merit that can gain favor with God, only God’s grace. We are sinners (Rom 3:10–12) and are saved by Jesus Christ alone (Acts 4:12), if we believe in Him.

3. God’s Reaction

a. The Appearance of Gabriel

vv.20–22 *How does God answer prayers (according to the Bible)?*

- God may answer immediately, as in this case.
- The fulfillment of our request may not be seen easily and directly (e.g., Job).
- God may not answer as we have asked Him (e.g., Paul’s thorn in the flesh).
- In any case, God appreciates our prayers.
- He always reacts, but in the way He deems best, because He loves us (e.g., Moses is not allowed to enter the promised land, but is taken to heaven after his death).

b. Gabriel’s Speech

v. 23 God loves Daniel, and He loves us.

He listens to our prayers and is gracious and merciful.

The vision mentioned in Daniel 9:21 is the vision of Daniel 8. Gabriel now helps Daniel understand the time element of Daniel 8, the 2,300 evenings and mornings (see also v. 23).

v. 24 Seventy weeks are weeks of years (490 years). They refer to God’s people of old. The end of transgression and sin, the atonement for iniquity, the bringing of everlasting righteousness, and the anointment of the most holy place refer to the fulfillment of the plan of salvation as brought about by Jesus towards the end of the seventy weeks.

v. 25 The time of the beginning of the 490 years is linked to the command to rebuild Jerusalem. There were three such commands (520 BC, 537 BC, 457 BC), but the third, issued by King Artaxerxes, was the most comprehensive one and granted Jews some kind of autonomy.

The anointed one is without doubt the Messiah, Jesus. He would appear after seven plus sixty-two weeks—that is, after 483 years, in the year AD 27. In this year Jesus was baptized and began his public ministry.

v.26 Sometime after the sixty-nine weeks the Messiah would die. Verse 27 provides further information. The rest of the verse relates to the Romans and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Regarding the “flood,” see Isaiah 8:7–8.

v. 27 Jesus would strengthen the covenant that God had established with His people. He would even bring about the new covenant (Heb 10:16–17), a continuation of the old covenant. In the middle of the last week (the seventieth week)—that is, after three and one half years, the sacrificial system would come to an end. The curtain of the temple would be torn (Matt 27:51) and the system of prefiguration ended. The “abomination of desolation” points to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus mentions this fact in Matthew 24:15–21. The seventy weeks (490 years) would end in AD 34. At this time Stephen would die as the first Christian martyr.

c. The Relation to Daniel 8

Verses 21 and 23 have established a relation between Daniel 9 and Daniel 8 with its unexplained time element (linguistic and conceptual links). Therefore, the 490 years must be connected with the 2,300 years and this in such a way that the 490 years are a part of the 2,300 years and that the 490 years, whose starting point can be calculated, help establish dates for the 2,300 years. This is only possible if the seventy weeks and the 2,300 evenings and mornings have the same starting point. The 490 years stretch from 457 BC to AD 34 and the 2,300 years from 457 BC to AD 1844, the time of the end (Dan 8:17, 19, 26).

Beginning with AD 1844 the heavenly sanctuary would be vindicated and cleansed. Jesus would begin the second phase of His high priestly ministry. This includes a special work of judgment in favor of the saints (Dan 7 and 8). When this ministry comes to an end, Jesus will come again and establish His kingdom.

IV. Application

Daniel 9 particularly addresses prayer and the revelation of the coming of the Messiah, providing exact dates. This concerns us.

- Praying can be a meaningless repetition of words. It also can be a wonderful conversation with God. For this to happen the desire to establish a relationship with God. This includes humility, respect, honesty, openness, and confession of sins. In prayer we can bring to God our praise, gratitude, and requests.
- However, sometimes there are problems with prayer. First, we may not pray enough. We may bring to God our petitions but run away. We may only pray in times of distress. However, our heavenly Father delights in daily conversation with us. Second, sometimes God does not seem to react to our prayers. Most Christians have experienced these “desert” times. But in these times God is especially close to us.
- God hears prayers. Daniel is an example of God answering a human being. We too experience God’s interventions.
- God has a specific plan of salvation. He even had a specific time in mind for when His Son would come to save us (Gal 4:4). Daniel 9 is a unique chapter, focusing on Jesus and His ministry. It provides the precise date for the public appearance of the Messiah. While the Old Testament contains many messianic prophecies that help identify the Messiah, the one in Daniel 9 is of specific importance. Taking seriously this unique prophecy, it is impossible to talk about the appearance of the God-sent Messiah before or after the first century AD. The Messiah had to come in AD 27—no sooner and no later. With the other characteristics added, there is no other way than to identify Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah.

But Daniel 9 also solves the conundrum of the time prophecy in Daniel 9. Again it is associated with Jesus. In 1844 Jesus as heavenly High Priest began a phase of His ministry that would restore the heavenly sanctuary and bring to an end the sin problem.

God gave us time prophecies that were exactly fulfilled. We can trust Him and His Word. Evil will finally be defeated and His kingdom of eternal peace be established.

Conclusion

God and His word are trustworthy, being fulfilled in astonishing ways. We rely on Him. In prayer we turn to the Lord who hears us.

10/16

Copyright © Biblical Research Institute General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists®