

What would you do if a man walked into the room where you were with your family, grabbed your daughter's arm, and started bending her fingers against the joints? What would you do if the man continued to aggravate your daughter's hand to the point that she winced in pain? Would you rush to your child's aid, and rescue her from the man's grasp?

I had this very experience last week. I must confess to you that while the man was bending my daughter's fingers, and while my daughter was grimacing in pain, I didn't try to stop him. I just watched.

The man was an orthopedic specialist, and the girl was my daughter, Julie, who broke her arm eight weeks ago. The room was the physician's office in Columbus, and the reason for the pain-causing, finger-bending was my daughter's recovery.

In the midst of the examination, Dr. Torch (who shared that his patients often refer to him as Dr. *Torture!*) made the statement, "I regret the pain, Julie, but pain is part of the healing process. As has been said, 'No pain, no gain.'"

I would never allow some guy off the street to inflict pain on my daughter, nor would you, but I would accept it from the wise hands of a physician. What makes the difference? Two things. One, Dr. Torch is a specialist who has helped thousands of people in the past. And two, he has a plan, and though his plan involves pain, his desired end is the good of his patient.

That's what Daniel learned about God and God's people and pain in Daniel 9.

Pain was no abstract concept for Daniel. When he was a young boy, he watched his home be ransacked by cruel soldiers. Then, along with several of his Jewish peers, he was separated from his parents and hauled off to exile in Babylon, hundreds of miles away from Jerusalem. For more than the next six decades, he felt the pain of being removed from his beloved homeland.

Why would God allow godly people like Daniel to experience such pain? It's because, as Daniel learned and shared in chapter 9, God has a plan for His people. God, Who is like a wise physician-specialist, has a plan to restore His broken, sinful people to wholeness and holiness. His plan involves pain, but it's pain with a purpose.

Why did God chastise the Israelites in the 6th century B.C.? Yes, because they had disobeyed Him, but what was the purpose of the pain? The desired results were the good of God's people and the glory of God.

With that perspective in mind, let's turn our attention to Daniel 9. I've entitled this message, "An Amazing Prediction," for in the final section of this chapter, Daniel recorded one of the most incredible prophecies found anywhere in the Bible.

Proposition: There are two benefits we can derive from Daniel's experience recorded in Daniel 9:20-27.

- I. Benefit #1: We learn about prayer (20-23).
 - A. He prayed a specific prayer (20).
 1. It was a prayer of confession.
 2. It was a prayer of supplication.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

- B. He received a specific answer (21-23).
 - 1. God hears us when we pray.
 - 2. God responds to us when we seek His honor.
 - 3. God desires persistence in prayer.
- II. Benefit #2: We learn about prophecy (24-27).
 - A. God revealed His plan (24).
 - 1. He operates with a time-frame in mind.
 - 2. He operates with a goal in mind.
 - His aim is to remove sin.
 - His aim is to restore righteousness.
 - B. God revealed the particulars of His plan (25-27).
 - 1. There will be 69 'sevens' from the decree to the Messiah (25).
 - 2. After 62 'sevens', tragedy will occur (26).
 - The Messiah will be cut off.
 - The temple will be destroyed.
 - 3. In the seventieth 'seven,' a Rival will come.
 - He will confirm a covenant with many.
 - He will violate the covenant.
 - He will be dealt with according to God's decree.

Implication: We must line up our lives with God's plan.

I. Benefit #1: We learn about prayer (20-23).

The first 19 verses of Daniel 9 record Daniel's prayer. Daniel was perplexed by a problem that moved him to pray. His people had been in captivity nearly 70 years. While reading the book recorded by Jeremiah the prophet, Daniel learned that God predicted He would restore His people to their homeland after 70 years. The time was nearly up, so Daniel hit his knees. We can observe two things about Daniel's prayer in verses 20-23.

A. He prayed a specific prayer (20). The actual prayer ends in v 19, and is followed by this explanation of Daniel in v 20, "And while I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people, Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD, for the holy mountain of my God."

Prayer was no rote ritual for Daniel. When he spoke with God, it was not a mechanical recitation, but a heart-felt conversation with God. If you doubt that, just notice the words Daniel uses here to describe his activity in his prayer closet. He says he was "speaking," "praying," "confessing," and "presenting my supplication before the LORD." Rather than engage in vague small-talk with God, Daniel prayed a specific prayer marked by two ingredients.

1. *It was a prayer of confession.* What is confession? The truth is we all sin, and we don't have the ability to rewind the video and undo our shameful past. Is there hope? Yes, God forgives sin if we will do what Daniel did. Confess sin. To confess means to acknowledge a fact, whether good or bad. To confess is to admit the truth about what we've done and what we deserve. That's exactly what Daniel did in his prayer. Four times he admitted (5, 8, 11, 15), "We have sinned."

2. *It was a prayer of supplication.* Daniel asked God for something. No, his request wasn't for himself, but for what? You'll see the focus of his petition at the end of v 20, "For the holy mountain of God." The truth is, Daniel was pleading with God for Jerusalem, the holy mountain of God.

Jerusalem was in shambles. The city was an embarrassment to God's reputation. It wasn't personal pleasure or whim that framed Daniel's prayer, as sadly it is too often for

us. For Daniel, it was God's Word and God's reputation that moved him to pray a specific prayer. Guess what happened next?

B. He received a specific answer (21-23). In v 21, Daniel reveals that his prayer was interrupted, "Yea, while I was speaking in prayer, even the man, Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation." Notice that--"while I was speaking"--Daniel wasn't even finished with his prayer when a guest touched him.

The visitor was the angel Gabriel. Daniel refers to him as "the man," not to deny that he was an angel but so as to identify his guest as the person he met in his earlier vision recorded in chapter 8 (8:15-16). It's interesting that though the angel flew swiftly, he did not arrive until the end of Daniel's prayer.

Don't miss the time-indicator in v 21. What time of day was Daniel praying? He says Gabriel arrived "about the time of the evening oblation," that is, the time of the evening sacrifice. But wait a minute. Wasn't the temple in shambles? Yes. Hadn't the sacrificial system lie dormant for decades? Yes. Yet still Daniel thinks of it.

When he was a boy, Daniel had seen the smoke rise from the temple into the afternoon sky, a sight which reminded him that God accepts sinful people on the basis of a sacrifice offered in their behalf. The evening sacrifice usually began around 3 P.M. (Walvoord, 215), and that was the time when Daniel prayed. And God answered.

Here's what Gabriel told him (22-23, NIV), "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision." We can observe three lessons about prayer from this exchange.

1. *God hears us when we pray.* I'm fascinated by what the angel told Daniel. When did God give Daniel an answer to his prayer? As soon as he *began* to pray! Wow! God, Who is sovereign, hears and knows our prayers *before* we even finish. He hears us!

2. *God responds to us when we seek His honor.* Why did the angel say that God answered Daniel's request? V 23 "For thou art greatly beloved." The NIV puts it this way, "For you are highly esteemed."

The fact is that God doesn't respond to everyone's prayer the way he did to Daniel's. On another occasion, God turned a deaf ear to Jewish prayers, and Isaiah reveals why in Isaiah 59:1-2, "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear; But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, that he will not hear."

But God responded to Daniel's prayer because Daniel sought God's honor.

3. *God desires persistence in prayer.* I've been pondering a question. If God sent Gabriel to give Daniel an answer as soon as he began to pray, and apparently Gabriel didn't arrive until the end of his prayer, why the delay? I'm not sure, but the angel's later comment in 10:12-13 indicates that delays may be due to a spiritual battle.

We must be persistent in prayer. Prior to Jesus' parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18, Luke recorded this preface (1), "And He spoke a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." God desires persistence. He rewards those who diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6). Too often, however, we lack persistence.

Andrew Murray once wrote, "Our great danger, in this school of the answers delayed, is the temptation to think that, after all, it may not be God's will to give us what we ask.

If our prayer be according to God's Word, and under the leading of the Spirit, let us not give way to these fears. Let us learn to give God time."

Are you praying for an unsaved spouse or child or parent? Don't stop. The answer may be already on the way. Be persistent in praying for God to bring honor to Himself.

II. Benefit #2: We learn about prophecy (24-27).

Have you ever leaned over a drinking fountain with great anticipation for a cool drink, pressed the button, and got drenched by the unexpected spray? You got more than you bargained for! Daniel must have felt that way after what happened to him in Daniel 9.

When Daniel prayed that day, he was perplexed by a specific issue--How long would it be until God would restore the exiled Jews to their homeland? When God sent His answer through Gabriel, He gave Daniel that and a whole lot more! In fact, God revealed two things to Daniel.

A. God revealed His plan (24). In v 24 (NIV), God shared with Daniel His prophetic schedule for the nation of Israel, "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."

Walvoord and others suggest that the final four verses in Daniel 9 contain one of the most important prophecies in the Old Testament. The problem for us is that there are at least *five* different interpretations of what the prophecy means! Which is right? My purpose is to help you to see what the text says, not to use the text to support a pre-conceived system. Notice the text of v 24 indicates two things about God's plan.

1. *He operates with a time-frame in mind.* The text says, "Seventy weeks are determined." The verb is passive. Who determined the seventy weeks? The implied subject is *God*. God did. God told Daniel that His plan for Israel would involve seventy "weeks" of future events.

Actually, the term "weeks" is simply a unit of measure which refers to seven things. We use the word "dozen" in the same way to designate a collection of twelve things. The term doesn't stand alone. If you went to the store and told the cashier, "Give me a dozen," he would reply, "A dozen of what?" So it is in v 24 (Strauss, 268).

When Gabriel told Daniel, "Seventy sevens are determine," the natural question is, "Seventy sevens of what?" Clearly the prophecy is dealing with time, but how much time? Seventy seconds, days, months, or years? The context of v 2, which states that Daniel had just finished reading Jeremiahs' prophecy dealing with seventy *years*, indicates that the seventy sevens have to do with years.

God's time-frame for Israel would involve "seventy sevens" of years, or 490 years (divided as we'll see in a moment into 3 sections). Lehman Strauss puts it this way (270), "Daniel had been reading in Jeremiah of the seventy years' captivity in Babylon. Then it is as though God said, 'Yes, Daniel, you have discovered rightly that the seventy years captivity recorded by Jeremiah are coming to their end. But now I want to show you another *seventy*, a time period within which I shall accomplish all My plans for My people and My holy city." So in His plan, God operates with a time-frame in mind--490 years of future activity for Israel. Notice there is no mention that these are 490 consecutive years.

You say, "Why the time-frame? What does God have in mind for these 490 years?"

2. *He operates with a goal in mind.* To be specific, He has six goals which can be grouped into two categories. You see, God had a bigger goal for the Jews than merely to get them back to the Promised Land. He tells us His two aims here.

- His aim is to remove sin. Notice the first three things that Gabriel predicted God would accomplish in the 490 years: "To finish transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for wickedness." But getting rid of sin is only half the battle.

- His aim is to restore righteousness. The final three purpose clauses state: "To bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy." My friends, these are God's goals for the world--to deal with sin, and produce righteousness. Ever since Adam fell in the garden, God's goal has been to get rid of sin, and restore righteousness.

May I ask you a question? Do your goals line up with God's goals? Is it your goal to remove sin and see it replaced with righteousness in *your* life? Is that your goal for *your* family? Is it really? Jesus said if your hand is causing you to sin, cut it off--that is, take whatever drastic action it takes to get rid of sin. We can't forsake sin and still fondle it.

Are you holding on to some sin right now? I talked with a man recently who is involved with a woman who is not his wife. As I tried to share Christ with him, he felt very uncomfortable because he knew the gospel requires him to leave his life of sin. And he didn't want to. Is there some habit of sin you need to abandon in order to please God?

You say, "I want to change, but how can I?" The answer is, you can't. But God can. In fact, Daniel 9, reveals that getting rid of sin and restoring righteousness is what God said *He* would do. When? It's quite obvious that Gabriel is looking beyond the return of the Jews in the 6th century to the time when God would once and for all deal with sin.

When was that? We find the answer in verses 25-27.

B. God revealed the particulars of His plan (25-27). Three particulars.

1. *There will be 69 'sevens' from the decree to the Messiah (25).* V 25 states, "Know, therefore, and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah, the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times." This is an incredible prophecy, even though we can't be dogmatic about a few of the details.

The basic thrust of the prophecy, as Daniel heard it, was quite remarkable (LB), "Now listen! It will be 49 years plus 434 years from the time the command is given to rebuild Jerusalem, until the Anointed One comes!"

The debated question is, "When would the stop-watch start ticking?" The Messiah will come in 483 years, yes, but 483 years from when? Gabriel said, "From the going forth of the commandment to restore and rebuild Jerusalem." When did that occur?

There were at least three decrees given which had to do with the restoration of Jerusalem and the temple. The first was by king Cyrus in 538 B.C., but it had to do primarily with rebuilding the temple, not the city itself. A second was made by Darius in 517 B.C., but again had to do primarily with the Temple renovation. A third decree was issued by Artaxerxes in 445 B.C. It was at that time, under the leadership of Nehemiah, that the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt.

So let's assume that the clock started ticking in 445 B.C. Gabriel said there would be "seven sevens" (49 years) and "sixty-two sevens" (434 years). Why the two-fold breakdown? Walvoord suggests because after the decree in 445, it took a whole generation (49 years) to clear out the debris and restore a thriving city in Jerusalem. The clock would stop ticking 434 years later when the Messiah arrived.

Here's where the scholars debate the fine print. Did Gabriel have in mind solar years or lunar years? Did he account for leap years or not? Don't miss the obvious in looking at the fine print. For the sake of illustration, if you calculate using 360 days to the year (based on a Jewish calendar), and add extra days for leap years, the 483 year clock stops around the year A.D. 30, which was the probable year that Jesus Christ was crucified!

2. *After 62 'sevens', tragedy will occur (26).* It's described in v 26 (NIV), "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."

God told Daniel that after the second period of 434 years, two tragedies would occur.

- The Messiah will be cut off. Indeed He was. Followed by another tragedy.
- The temple will be destroyed. Notice the text merely says that "after" the sixty-two sevens (434 years) this would happen. It didn't predict how soon after the 434 years the city and temple would be destroyed, but just said "after." History tells us it didn't take long. Forty years later, in the year A.D. 70, the Romans under Titus completely obliterated Jerusalem. The temple was eliminated, and the Jewish nation ceased to exist for the next almost 19 centuries, until 1948.

3. *In the seventieth 'seven,' a Rival will come.* God told Daniel that He was going to use 490 years to accomplish His purpose with Israel. He didn't say the years would necessarily be consecutive years. In fact, it appears that the prophecy of "seventy sevens" is like a telescope that contains a "gap."

The first 69 sevens have already happened. We are living in a parenthesis between the sixty-ninth seven and the seventieth seven. Remember, God told Daniel that the 70 sevens pertained to His future dealings with Israel. But Israel has been on the shelf for the past 1900+ years during this time of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24), this Church-age. Paul said this parenthesis was a "mystery" (Col 1) not clearly spelled out in the OT.

But God is not finished with the Jews (remember His goals stated in v 24). God will bring a final seven year period in which He will allow a Rival to come, known as the Anti-Christ, during a period the Bible calls the Tribulation. V 27 identifies 3 events of the Rival.

- He will confirm a covenant with many. Particularly with the Jews.
- He will violate the covenant. As v 27 predicts, "In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering." A coming powerful dictator will break his promise to the Israeli nation, and turn on the Jews. You say, "How do you know this will happen?" Jesus affirmed it in Matthew 24:15, 21, "When you shall see the abomination of desolation, *spoken of by Daniel the prophet*...For then shall be great tribulation." Fear not, however, for God will have the final word with this coming Rival.

- He will be dealt with according to God's decree. As Daniel wrote (27 NIV), "Until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."

My friend, Israel is back in the land today. The first 69 sevens that God predicted have happened just like God said. You can count on it that the seventieth seven will happen, too. Maybe soon. Are you ready for the future? How do we get ready?

Implication: We must line up our lives with God's plan.

Response:

God has a plan, and His Son, Jesus Christ, is the agent of that plan. The five verses of the next song review the accomplishments of our Savior, from the cross to His second coming. There is but one word that is an appropriate response to what He has done-- "Hallelujah!" What a Savior!

Hymn of Response: #175 "Hallelujah, What a Savior!"

We have been thinking about the plan of God this morning. In His plan, God's goal is to get rid of sin and produce a righteous people. The reason God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, was to accomplish this goal. All who will repent of their sins and trust in Him will be declared righteous by God. Let's bow our heads and consider some questions:

1. God's goal is to remove sin. Do you desire to see that happen in your life? Is there some pet sin in your life that God wants to remove? Perhaps an ungodly habit, or an unforgiving spirit towards someone. Maybe a vicious tongue or involvement in pornography. Confess it to God right now. Repent of it, and choose to forsake it.

2. God's goal is to restore righteousness. He wants to change you to be like His righteous Son. Is that what you want? If it is, tell Him. Are there some steps you need to take today to become Christ-like? Have you ever received Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? Have you ever testified to that publicly by being baptized? Are you filling your life with the tools the Holy Spirit wants to use to make you righteous in character as you are in position? Tools like daily Bible study, prayer, faithful church attendance, choosing godly friends. Today is the day to choose to line up your life with God's plan.

Prayer of Response

As God's people, we live with two perspectives. We look back, and we look ahead. We look back to Christ's first coming, and we look ahead to His second coming. Are you ready to see Him? As you listen to this next song, prepare your heart to see Him.

Ministry in Music: Marquita Riepenhoff

As we prepare to leave from this time of worship, we want to leave with God's plan fixed in our minds. The Messiah, Jesus, is coming again. When He comes, He will rid the world of death and sin. When He comes, heaven and earth at last will sing. Our final song is a prayer-song in which we invite Him to come.

Worship through Singing: #243 "O Come, Messiah, Come Again"