GOD WILL PUT AN END TO SIN

Daniel 9:1-27
Key Verse: 9:24

“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.”

We have been studying Daniel’s prophetic visions given to him during his time of service to the kings of Babylon and the Medes and Persians. Daniel’s visions all concern a time of great trial and upheaval for his people, called the time of the end. In their most immediate sense, they probably all look forward to the time when Antiochus Epiphanes, the despotic Seleucid king, would come and seek to put an end to the Jews and to the worship of God. However, Daniel himself was living through another time of great loss and upheaval for the Jews because of the Babylonian exile. Therefore, Daniel could put the upcoming sufferings and trials of the Jews into the greater context of God’s plan for world redemption. In today’s passage, Daniel is inspired by Scripture to come to God in prayer for the sake of understanding God’s purpose and hope for his people. Daniel’s prayer is an outstanding example for people of every generation, because of his passionate plea to move God’s heart and bring relief to his suffering people. We also see that God answers Daniel’s prayer by sending his angel Gabriel. God reveals to Daniel his firm decision to put an end to sin and to bring in everlasting righteousness. May God help us to work together with our God as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, until his vision for world salvation is fulfilled!

I. Daniel’s prayer (1-19)

First, Daniel’s Bible study (1-3). Look at verse 1. “In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom.” The Babylonian kingdom had been defeated and Nebuchadnezzar’s line had been put to an end. A new empire, that of the Medes and Persians, was being established. It was a time of
upheaval and uncertainty. What did Daniel do in such a time? Look at verse 2. “...in the first year of his 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.” While ordinary people were shaking in fear at what the beast-like empires of the world might do next, Daniel came to God by studying carefully the Scriptures, including the prophetic writings of the prophet Jeremiah.

Unlike many of the other prophets, Jeremiah had written down most of his prophecies and had them compiled in his lifetime. When his prophecy that Jerusalem would be taken by Babylon was fulfilled, they quickly became accepted as divinely inspired, and included as Scripture. In them, Jeremiah had foretold of the fall of the Babylonian empire after the third generation of Nebuchadnezzar’s line (Jer. 27:7), which was fulfilled when Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson, was slain by the Mede, Darius. Jeremiah also foretold in his letter to the exiles that after suffering 70 years under Babylonian rule, God himself would come to his people and bring them back to Jerusalem. Jeremiah 29:13-14 says, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back from the place from which I carried you into exile.”

As Daniel considered Jeremiah’s prophecy, he understood that the time of liberation for Israel from Babylonian captivity had come. The Babylonians had fallen. The seventy years of captivity were nearly over. But God had warned his people that to find God, they must seek God with all their heart. In short, the fulfillment of Scriptures depended on the peoples’ repentance, not just on God’s set timetable. God had made known the promise of a return in seventy years to inspire his people to repent and to believe in God's good purpose and mission for them as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:5,6). But God's people had to believe his word of promise. They had to overcome their despair and come to God in faith. They had to prove their repentance through their submission to God as Sovereign Lord and their willingness to serve him as kings and priests.
Daniel was just one man among his fellow exiles. But Daniel did not think that he could do nothing as one man. Daniel obeyed the Scriptures, and turned to God with all of his heart. Look at verse 3. “So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.” Daniel did not seek God superficially. Daniel humbled himself before God. It was Daniel’s fervent hope that God might accept his prayer as intercessory prayer for all of God’s people. Daniel was an underling to the Medean king Darius and a Jewish exile. But in fact Daniel was the high priest for his people, the Jews. He made intercession for them on their behalf through his prayer. Indeed, he took responsibility for their sins upon himself. Daniel was a good shepherd for the flock of God under his care. May God help us to learn the heart of Daniel, who prayed for the people of Israel in obedience to God’s word in Jeremiah!

Second, Daniel’s confession of sin (4-14). Look at verses 4-6. “I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. 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.” Here, Daniel confesses his sins and the sins of his people. They had rebelled against God’s purpose. They had rejected his law of love. They had hardened their hearts not to hear his rebukes. What was the result? Look at verse 7. “Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame—the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.” Those who refuse to listen to God and to God’s servants do so because they think that they are smarter than God. They rebel, because they don’t want to submit to God’s will when they are sure that they can obtain a better future for themselves through their selfish calculation. It all sounds very good, until they must face up to the reality. Now was the time for the Jews to face up to the reality. The Lord was righteous; he had been right. They, on the other hand, were covered in shame with no one to blame but themselves.
The people of Jerusalem had been confident that God’s promise to make Israel and Jerusalem an everlasting possession of his people was a guarantee that they could never lose the holy city. They began to treat the city of Jerusalem and the temple there as a “den of robbers” (Jer. 7:11), a place where they could hide out and be safe after committing many sins. But God saw what they were doing. God had foretold it, even in the Law of Moses. But they closed their eyes and their ears not to hear and not to see. Now, everything that had been foretold had come to pass. Look at verse 12. “You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem.” The Jews were very sorry to have lost their city and their temple. But that was not enough. They needed to change. Look at verse 13. “Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us, yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth.” The time had come for the people of God to stop feeling sorry for themselves, and repent for their proud minds and disobedient hearts.

Daniel was a great man, who had made many difficult decisions to keep his heart right before God. He might have asked, “Why am I suffering along with these rebellious Jews?” But Daniel did not excuse himself from responsibility for Israel’s sins. They were his sins, too. Many people hope that personal righteousness will excuse them from having to take responsibility for God’s world salvation purpose. They say, “I am ok, the world can go to hell!” But our “personal righteousness” cannot serve as our personal “den of robbers.” Those who reject responsibility for carrying out God’s world salvation work are rebels against God. We must repent of our self-confidence while living in a world that is in rebellion against God. We must learn the shepherd heart of Daniel that takes the responsibility for fulfilling God’s world salvation plan. We must bear the responsibility for the sin of the world as shepherds for his flock. We must follow the example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Third, Daniel’s plea for mercy (15-19). Given the persistent rebellion and sin of God’s people, what could be the basis for Daniel’s plea on their behalf? Daniel acknowledged his sins and the sins of his people. He admitted that they were not righteous. But his confidence was in the righteousness of God. Look at verses 16-17. “O 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 fathers have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us. Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary.” Through his prayer, we see that Daniel understood very well the Biblical principle that God intervenes on the behalf of his people for the sake of his own righteousness and glory. Many people become confused about this basic truth. They want to think that God somehow admires them for having believed or having trusted in God’s word at some point in their lives. But God is pleased, for the sake of his own glory, to honor his promises to an unfaithful and rebellious people. God is pleased to reward those who acknowledge this complete and total salvation of God in their lives. Our confidence must never be in ourselves or in what we can do. But we must learn to have confidence in the mercy, love and truth of our God.

Let’s read verses 18 and 19 together. “Give ear, O 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. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.” O Lord, forgive us that we only enjoyed your blessings as Americans! May God help us to repent of our self-righteousness and pride, and live lives worthy of the Name God has given us! May God help us to faithfully humble ourselves in prayer, not only for our selves, but especially for the flock of God under our care!

II. The Messiah (20-27)

First, Gabriel’s decree (20-24). Daniel poured out his heart to God in prayer. It was a great struggle, and Daniel had been praying all day long, so that it was now the time of the evening sacrifice. Then Daniel
looked up and saw the angel Gabriel coming to him in swift flight. He had come in answer to Daniel's prayer. Daniel was highly esteemed in heaven. It was because of his fervent prayer life. Now, after this great struggle in prayer, Daniel was not frightened by Gabriel as he had been in the previous vision. He listened to Gabriel's message and explanation.

Look at verse 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.” According to Gabriel’s decree, God’s people were not finished with suffering for their sins. There was still more to come. But it would not last forever. God had in mind to put an end to sin. God would pay the price for sin through a sacrifice of atonement, and bring in everlasting righteousness for his people. It is an amazing message of hope and victory to God’s suffering people. We are not destined to suffer in a stalemate with sin forever. We are destined as God's people to enjoy God's everlasting righteousness and to be done with sin. Therefore, our struggle to live a holy life in God, and to obey his commands for world mission are not in vain. Whatever suffering we might have to face as we serve him and his flock is nothing compared to the glory that we will share when the end decreed for sin comes. This promise reminds us of Romans 8:18. “I consider our present sufferings not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” God is not content to leave his people locked in an eternal battle with sin. God will put an end to sin. God's Son, Jesus Christ, appeared, to destroy the devil's work (1 Jn 3:8).

Second, The two rulers (25-27). Look at verses 25 and 26. “Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree 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. 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.” If one calculates carefully, starting from the last decree given to Nehemiah to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem by
Artaxerxes in 443 BC, and by interpreting the “sevens” as seven years of 360 days each, we can place the end of the 69 sevens, when the Anointed One is cut off, as the very day when Jesus was crucified for the sins of the world. On that day, the end of the devil’s work was fixed in stone. Nevertheless, the devil has sought to undermine God’s victory by sending his own ruler, one who would confirm a covenant with many to lead God’s people astray. Most of all, the devil counts on the people of God failing to pray like Daniel for the sake of God’s world salvation purpose. The devil is really happy when the people of God argue and fight over dates and numbers and genealogies. But the devil is very sorry when people pray with a shepherd heart like Daniel, for God will answer the persistent prayers of his people, his Son Jesus will come again, and the end that is decreed for the devil will come like a thief.

May God help us to be faithful to our holy mission until the end God has decreed for sin and death comes!