Prayers of repentance and God’s answers:

A study in Daniel 9

Given by Bob Mendelsohn

Father’s Day: 3 September 2017

LCM Churches, Lane Cove, NSW

**Salutation**

Thank you Darren, and all the staff, and all the volunteers who make LCM such a great place in Lane Cove, among His people on the North Shore. Thank you for welcoming me again this morning to teach in our congregation’s series on the book of Daniel. I’ve been assigned chapter nine, and I’m grateful to share this with you.

**Introduction**

In a couple weeks on 20 September, Jewish people worldwide will pray penitential prayers, confessing sins and entering into what is known as the Ten Days of Awe or Ten Days of Repentance with serious considerations of sin. This might make sense to you, here at Lane Cove, that Jewish people should do that, but some of you might know that most Jewish people don’t think much about sin, that is, throughout the year. We give ourselves to good works, to charity, to benefiting the world, but not to our own measure or level of holiness. Sin is a Christian issue, most would aver, but not one with which we have to deal.

But this season speaks differently and certainly today’s reading in Daniel 9 screams loudly that this is not the case. In this passage we’ve just heard read it is clear. [If you are listening online, please pause this talk just now and read the whole 27 verses, then come back to hearing what we are saying. Thank you.]

Daniel, as you have been learning here at church, is a noble, great character, the kind of guy you want to have at youth group. The kind of man you want to work with you in the next office. He’s the kind of person you want in your home group. He knew when to speak and when to be silent. He knew that God was able to do amazing things, and yet, even if He didn’t, Daniel was going to trust Him.

So in today’s reading we see Daniel taking on board the sins of the Jewish people so as to bring them to the Almighty and for Him to deal with them in His timing. And we see God’s promise of a Messiah to come, to be the hero/Savior we need to deliver us from the very issues Daniel is confessing.

1. **OBSERVATION OF THE TIMES**

Before we look at Daniel’s lengthy prayer and God’s answer, let’s note what prompts it. Babylon is now ruled by a king of Median birth, as Jeremiah had promised (51:28). The punishment that Jeremiah threatened (25:12–14) has begun. The restoration of the exiles (Jer 29:10), and the restoration of Jerusalem that Isaiah and Ezekiel promised, ought therefore to be imminent. Thus we can imagine an exilic Daniel noting the passages in Jeremiah 25-29 that spoke of a seventy–year exile and wondering about their fulfilment; Zechariah, after all, did so.

What prompts Daniel’s prayer is observing the situation. When King David raised an army, people came from throughout the land to sign up. Of note were “the sons of Issachar, who were men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do.” (1 Chronicles 12.32) These were people who listened to their prophets and saw the signs of the times.

Listen, to make changes, you have to know when change is required. Alarms might be annoying to you when you hear one outside your home, but you can be sure that the alarm is designed to assist, not to annoy. Someone is being burgled, or a smoke alarm notifies us of imminent danger with fire or such. A red light on your car’s dashboard may bother you, but be sure to get to the servo sooner rather than later to see to the problem. Alarms signal problems. Only the foolish dismiss such alarms.

1. **PREPARATION FOR PRAYER**

That God has spoken through the prophets (Amos 3.7) does not mean that all the believer needs to do today is sit, Fin Review and ABC radio at hand, awaiting the outcomes. The appropriate response to prophecy is prayer.

And before Daniel goes to the Temple to pray, before he sends out an email and shows on Instagram his bent knees, he readies himself. He drops everything. He cancels his appointments. He wakes early. And the book says, he ‘gave my attention’ but the Hebrew says he “gave his face” to the Lord. That means he got serious about things. Nothing else mattered. He turned off the TV. Face to face, he stood before God. Five things were used: prayers, supplications, fasting, sackcloth and ashes. Physical reminders of significance. And conversation with the God of the universe. Daniel had seen the signs; he knew the 70 years were up. The kingdom had changed, Darius was now king, the Medes ruled. Now he moves to prayer.

And it’s a serious preparation of prayer that begins.

I don’t know how you pray. Some close their eyes. Some bow their heads or bend their knees. Some sing. They say, “He who sings, prays twice.” Whatever you do to pray, getting into a new position, or into a new chair, lighting a candle or wearing special accoutrements …whatever you can do to prepare, do it. Knowing that the bent knee doesn’t impress God. The scent of the candle does not notify Him that He needs to turn and listen more closely. All of the preparation is for us, for our ‘giving our face’ to the Lord. His hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear too dull that he cannot hear. Our prayerfulness is about our rigorous honesty with Him.

1. **PRAYERS FOR SELF/ FOR THE PEOPLE**

This set of confessional prayers in chapter nine of Daniel are similar to the Selichot, the penitential prayers said on the Saturday night before Rosh Hashanah in the modern Jewish religion, that will be the 16th September this year. Most Jewish gatherings, certainly prayer meetings, happen in the daytime, but the Selichot prayers are offered around midnight. They are prayers and responses, sometimes sung in chorus, or merely uttered by individuals to get God’s attention, to remind Him to be merciful, to remind ourselves that we have sinned. The Hebrew word, “Selichot” means “sorries” and the root of that word is used in our text today at least two times.

*The Midrash relates that King David was anguished when he foresaw the destruction of the Holy Temple hundreds of years in the future, along with the cessation of the offering of the sacrifices. “How will the Jews atone for their sins?” he wondered.*

*G‑d replied: “When suffering will befall the Jews because of their sins, they should gather before Me in complete unity. Together they shall confess their sins and recite the order of the Selichot, and I will answer their prayers.”*

That’s how the rabbis dealt with their losses, and the obvious problem of the lack of blood sacrifices. I appreciate their challenge and their conclusion, but their answer is dead wrong. We do have to look at current settings and make determinations about our lives and our religion. To be sure. Daniel certainly did just that as he observed the times.

The answer to the situation of our losses, however, is not to commend ourselves. We have no good works in ourselves, we admit on Rosh Hashanah. So why do we count our prayers as ‘good enough?’ In verse 18, Daniel says, “we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion.“

The only way to be sure of God’s answers is not to commend ourselves. Israel (and dare I say Sydney Anglicans) has never been worthy of high praise from heaven. Every prophet in the Bible has nailed our people again and again with words of rebuke, our disregard of the Almighty, our failure to live justly in the land or outside the land. Our sins are ever before Him. What can we do? Perform good deeds? As if that would be enough?

Look, if you kill a guy and go to court, saying in your defence that you will do better next time, that’s a good resolve but the issue is the murder, not the future goodness you might demonstrate.

Our prayers of repentance bring God’s answer, if we are counting on His compassion. Even our prayers are not enough; God alone is our salvation.

1. *Prayer begins with Praise*

Daniel prayed for himself, he prayed for Israel, he prayed that God would exalt Himself in our midst. In verse 4 Daniel starts with prayer the way prayer should always begin, “God, you are…” Prayer begins with acknowledging who God is. Nehemiah began his prayer with the same words. (9.13) Joel uses this same phrase. (2.13) These are the words of God to Moses in Exodus 34 “Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth.” (v. 6) Even Jonah prayed this prayer with anger, saying something like, ‘God, I knew you were like this…that’s why I didn’t want you to send me to Nineveh…’ (4.2-3)

Prayer begins with preparations of self and then in verbiage with praise for who God is. Tell God who He is. It’s a reminder to ourselves; it’s a reminder to the Almighty.

1. *Prayer of intercession continues with confession of sins*

Verse 5: We have sinned.

Who sinned? Daniel said, “we have.” In reality, *they* have. But owning our national or civic or family sins.. that’s the mark of a saint. Corporate identification by a man of God for the people of God. This is a mark of humility which was evidenced in his sackcloth and ashes prep work. These are the words of a man who wants the work of God in his own days.

And the list of sins is comprehensive.

We have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. Moreover, we have not listened” …unfaithful deeds which they have committed against You. Open shame belongs to us.” so the curse has been poured out on us

As a result of all this sin, shame, even open shame is ours by right. By the way, “open” is the word for ‘face’ again. Shame in our face. Shame on our face, like a cream pie in an old sight gag, but this time, it’s mud and grime, and wickedness all over us. This, Daniel says, is the curse which has been poured out on us. We cannot hide it.

Prayer began with situational setting, then moved into praise and then confession of sins.

Daniel litanizes God’s righteousness and His right to do whatever He wants. He has declared His will in His word, so, Daniel alleges, please be consistent as you have been. And in the midst of this massive confessional, again Daniel reminds both himself and God that “To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness”

This is consistent with God in the Scriptures, he says. in

v. 11: oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him.

v. 12: He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us

v. 13 As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us.”

c. Intercession required identification.

For truly intercessional prayers, the identification with the people is required of the intercessor. It’s not a “God bless those guys” type of prayer. It’s a God, help us! The use of the first person plural is uncomfortable for some. It is for me. When I see people sinning, what does that have to do with me? But the corporate nature of our community, of our nation, of our country, of Israel.. it’s not to be missed. The Enlightenment and our tall fences outside our houses made us think we were islands, all alone, but the reality is that we are in this thing together.

How many times do you share what you believe with people and they answer you with “I don’t need church. I can pray on my own at home.” And to be fair, that has a good amount of truth in it. But what they don’t see is that we together are the church, and each of us is merely a blade in the lawn of grass, which when a larger foot comes along to trample us, will succeed if we are not joined together in the community. We need one another. We support each other. We hold each other accountable. And when it’s time for prayer, it’s not private. It’s corporate. That’s why we say, “Our Father” and not “My Father who art in heaven.” “Give us this day our daily bread.” Get it?

So when Daniel prays about Israel’s sins, he lists himself as a member of the needy community. We have sinned. We have failed. We are wrong. God have mercy.

Verse 20, he confesses his own sins, and the sins of Israel. That’s honourable. That’s how this intercession works.

1. **GABRIEL SHOWS UP: PROMISES MESSIAH**

The final section of chapter nine may well be said to be God’s answer to Daniel’s prayers. By the way, many rabbis won’t let their students read the end of this chapter until they are 30 years old. You will see why in a moment. The chapter ends with a description of some more messianic credentials.

As this angel explains, there are some numbers, or years, some famous personages and events, and some radical fixes that are going to take place.

The problems Daniel talked of in his prayer are going to be met with a divine answer. Even as Isaiah has said, “The Lord Himself” will do something. Here we see three things that will hallmark the answer to Daniel’s prayers.

1. Messiah will die

The death of Messiah was startling to me to read about in 1971. I had been raised an Orthodox Jew in the US, in Kansas City. There I learned about Messiah and about our religion. But I never knew Messiah would have pain and suffering in his own life. I knew we Jews were to suffer, and by that we would bring good to the world. I knew Messiah would conquer evil, but that he would suffer and die? Totally new to me.

Had I read the sources I would have learned that Rashi, the famous medieval rabbi, one of the top 5 rabbis of all times, taught Messiah would die and his son or grandson would take over. In 1994 a rabbi died in New York. Not surprising, since there are 2 million Jewish people who live in the environs of that great city. But this rabbi, Menachem Schneerson was different. Some had touted him to be the messiah. Some to this day continue to say that about him.

When he died that summer of 1994, tens of thousands of Jews gathered from around the world there in New York City to honour him but beyond that, to await his imminent resurrection. The rabbis teach that the spirit of a man hovers over a corpse for three days, but on the fourth day it departs. The rabbis and those who claimed Schneerson, The Rebbe, was the messiah were not surprised by his passing. But after he didn’t rise from the dead by the fourth day, they left his gravesite.

Verse 26 says “Messiah will be cut off.” Cut off from what? Like Isaiah said, “cut off from the land of the living.” In other words, He would die.

1. Messiah will die in a certain timeframe

The business of the calculations of the 70 weeks, or 62 weeks, or the 7 weeks, is all a bit confusing. Let me tell you this, there is no agreement among scholars on this one. But looking at the events of verses 25 and 26, there seems to be some marking that might help. Verse 25 says the time clock can begin ticking when you “know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah”. OK, when was this decree? Under Artaxerxes in the year 444 BCE. That’s when the permission was given to the Jewish people to go back and fix the Temple and the City.

And in verse 26 we read the end marker of the time period, “the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the City and the Sanctuary” and we even know what sanctuary we are addressing, from verse 24 “to anoint the Most Holy Place” (kodesh k’doshim). The ending is the destruction of the most holy place for Jewish people (obviously the Temple) and the City (Jerusalem) which will take place in 70 CE.

Looking at those two markers and using ‘weeks’ to mean ‘years” which would be consistent with Daniel’s use the 70 years and the use of a variant of the Hebrew word for ‘weeks’ anyway, then after 483 years between 444 BCE and ending by 70 CE, the Messiah had to die. However we calculate this, and in this book by Moishe Rosen, this prophecy is unpacked in a mere 3 pages with great clarity, we know Messiah will die during what you and I and historians and archaeologists call “The Second Temple period.” And with the weight on the weeks in the end, Messiah will die in what we call “The First Century.” No wonder so many rabbis won’t let their students read this passage until later on in life.

1. Messiah’s death will bring atonement

Finally we get to the purpose of Messiah’s dying. It says in verse 24 to “finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness.” The purpose of the death of Messiah is to answer the prayers of Daniel, to fix what is broken in our world. He will heal all the brokenness of lives, of families, of governments. He will put an end to wars and vanities. He will make the wolf lie down with the lamb. He will restore all that is broken in our lives. And set up His Kingdom once and for all. The Forever Father’s Day will be seen as we read last week, “One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed. (7.13-14)

What a day of rejoicing that will be!

What Jesus did in dying for us on the cross, in the First Century, exactly 483 years after the edict to restore Jerusalem, brought victory and salvation, in answer to Daniel’s prayers, in answer to Isaiah’s prayers, and to Hannah’s prayers. Now here’s even better news for most of you-- it’s not only for Jewish people. Messiah died in fulfilment of prophecy. What Jesus did was to bring in a dominion which is “for all the peoples, nations, and men of every language” Even Kiwis. Even Brits. Even those who barrack for the Hawthorn Hawks. Even all you Gentiles.

The scandal of God’s redemption for all people was never hidden from view in the Scriptures, but dismissed by many throughout time. I missed it. Most of my Jewish people miss it. Don’t you miss it. The Word is for all peoples. For your neighbours. For your friends. For those you don’t like.

Let us bring them the Good Word of the Lord. Let everyone hear. Messiah has come; Messiah died. He rose again. He lives today. And Messiah will come again in glory. Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

**What other lessons do we learn for our lives today from Daniel 9?**

First, see the situation, whatever that is, at work, at home, in your personal life. Evaluate it on the basis of Scripture, and your own heart. Be honest. Rigorously honest.

Then, Intercede as the situation demands, for others, include yourself, of course, but widen it, to include your community, your church, your family.

Wait for God’s answer, for it will surely come, maybe not as quickly as you request, but be confident, that’s what faith requires.

Finally, celebrate the God who answers in His time. He is worthy of all praise. He has done all things necessary to receive such accolades.

I’m happy to be part of this family of faith for the last 19 years. Patty and I along with our kids moved here in August 1998, and it’s been a good innings. We are honoured to be part of your financial considerations as well, as some of you have been giving to Jews for Jesus for a while, and others are invited to do so today, using that white card, or the tap and go credit card machine I have in the back at the resource table. [If you are listening online, you can give to Jews for Jesus on [PayPal](http://www.jewsforjesus.org.au/?p=1030) or on our [website](http://www.jewsforjesus.org.au/), ]

Please fill out that white card; please extend to us the privilege to share with you again as a result of that filling out the card. So many Jewish people are listening, at our book shop, in their homes, around the globe, in Berlin, Jerusalem, on the streets of Budapest right now, and here in Australia.

Thanks for your prayers for us.

Thanks for interceding for us and along with us, for the Jewish people, during Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and throughout our days, until Messiah returns.

What a day of rejoicing that will be.

Shalom.

For those online, if you want to join us for Rosh Hashanah in Bondi Junction, register [here](https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/rosh-hashanah-services-and-luncheon-tickets-37556385159) using “Free ticket” button. We are happy to host you. Thursday 21 September. 11 a.m.