

The Promise of Restoration

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[0 : 00] Our gracious Father, we do thank you again for your word and we thank you that you continue to speak to us through it and that you continue to give us wisdom to live in this world.

We do pray, Father, that as we come to yet another slightly difficult passage that you would help us to focus and to concentrate and to understand your word so that we might be encouraged by it. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, one of the hard things with promises is waiting for them to be fulfilled.

I was leading the women's Bible study group last Friday morning, the mums group, because their leader was away at the moment. And I gave an example. I said, for example, has your husband promised to fix something around the house and you're still waiting?

And they all looked at each other and groaned, yes. One said, you get your hopes up and then you wait and you wait and you wait. Another one said, or if they do fix it, they only half fix it, which kind of reminds me of a husband who was asked to fix the couch.

[1 : 03] And on the next slide, this is what he did. He just put a chair, a dining chair, in the couch. Now, the women amongst us are internally just shaking their heads, but the men amongst us are thinking, well, it works.

Now, we all had a bit of a laugh about this, and me particularly because my wife wasn't there, so I was safe. But the point is, one of the difficulties with promises is waiting for them to be fulfilled.

And it can sometimes be the same with God's promises. Take, for example, his promise to send Jesus back and put this world right, to put a new creation and to stop the fighting going on and so on.

So that's a promise I'm certainly waiting for, given the current climate in our world. I mean, I assume you've heard again about North Korea last week, where the UN sanctions were imposed, and then they responded by saying, the North Korean delegate said, we will make the US suffer the greatest pain it's ever experienced in its history.

And then they fired a missile over Japan. Or then the UK, there was another terrorist bomb. Thankfully, no one was killed this time. And then there's everything that's happening here in Australia with the Marriage Vote, the Safe Schools program, and social media and the like.

[2 : 17] And so with all this happening, I've been thinking more and more about God's promise to send Jesus to return so we can enjoy a perfect world of the new creation. But when will that happen? You see, one of the difficulties we often have with promises is waiting for them to be fulfilled.

For you, it might be God's promise to provide for your needs, or God's promise to work for your good, to make you like Christ, or whatever it is. Sometimes it's hard waiting for them to be fulfilled. And as we come to Daniel chapter 9 today, we come to one particular promise that Daniel had been waiting for God to fulfill. And it was the promise to bring Israel home from exile, from Babylon, and restore them as his people.

So we're at point 1 in your outlines and verse 1 in your Bibles. In the first year of Darius, son of Xerxes, a Mede by descent, even though he's the Persian ruler, who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom, 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 70 years.

Now from these first two verses, we learn two things. At first, that there is a new king in town, King Darius, who was the Persian king, and that means the Babylonians have been defeated, conquered.

[3 : 42] Second, we learn that Daniel was reading the Old Testament Scriptures, and in particular, the book of Jeremiah. So no doubt Daniel had read it before. In fact, the book of Jeremiah had been around for roughly 40 years, and so no doubt he had read it before.

But given the overthrow of Babylon, what Jeremiah said was particularly relevant now. You see, he was possibly reading, or probably reading, these verses on the next slide.

So Jeremiah 25, verse 11 says, This whole country, Israel, will become a desolate wasteland. This is before the exile. And these nations around will serve the king of Babylon 70 years.

But when the 70 years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, and the land of Babylonians for their guilt, declares the Lord. And what's happened? Darius has come in and defeated the Babylonians.

Or on the next slide from Jeremiah 29, this time, God says, When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you, Israel, and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place, the land of Israel.

[4 : 53] For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. And so again, what has happened? Well, Darius, the Persian king, is the new king in town.

Babylon has been defeated. And Daniel, at this stage, has been in exile for 66 years. So it seems like the promise that Daniel had been waiting for is about to be fulfilled.

And yet, despite all this, Daniel doesn't pack his bags with excitement or pray, Oh, come on, God, hurry up. We're almost there. Instead, he prays, We've sinned.

Please forgive. Point two, verse three. So I turned to the Lord after reading his word and talked to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting and in sackcloth and ashes.

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, We have sinned and done wrong.

[6 : 00] 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 ancestors, and to all the people of the land.

You see, Daniel responds to God's promise by praying. And his prayer begins with confession. And that's why he's in sackcloth and ash. It's the clothing of repentance.

And do you notice how he speaks in terms of sin breaking a relationship, a covenant? So in verse four, he speaks about a covenant of love.

It's a relationship, you see. And it's a covenant of love or a relationship that they have broken by turning away from God, ignoring his word through the prophets.

You see, sin is spoken of here in terms of breaking a personal relationship with God. Or in verse four, the word, the Lord, see the start of verse four, the word Lord is in capital letters, which is God's personal name, Yahweh.

[7 : 12] So whenever in the Bible, you see the word Lord in capital letters, it's the personal name of God. And this personal name of God is used seven times in the book of Daniel. And all seven of them are in this chapter.

You see, this promise to restore Israel and bring them home from exile is more than just restoring a nation. It's about restoring a relationship, reconciling a relationship, if you like, that was broken by sin.

Sin is not like, you know, ignoring a speed sign and sinning against some faceless state law, which is not good, by the way. But it's more like cheating on a spouse and sinning against one who loves you, which is far worse, isn't it?

And I wonder if we remember that that's how God sees sin, how, you know, much it hurts him. Do we realize it is actually personal to God? It's actually breaking relationship with God.

It's more serious than we think. And so when it comes to this particular promise to restore Israel, to restore the relationship, it is right that Daniel firstly confesses Israel's sin, which broke it.

[8 : 24] And he continues to do this, including acknowledging that God was right to judge them. Do you see verse seven? He says, Lord, you are righteous. You know, you are right to have done this.

But to this day, we are covered with shame, the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far in the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.

We and our kings, our princes, our ancestors are covered with shame, Lord, because we have sinned against you. You see how Daniel acknowledges that God is righteous or right to have put them here in exile.

And they are right to be covered in shame because, verse seven, they have been unfaithful in relationship. Or verse eight, because we have sinned, he says.

And so the only way God can keep his promise to restore them, to bring them back, is to first forgive them. And so Daniel alludes to this in verse nine.

[9 : 26] He says, the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving. Even though we have rebelled against him, we have not obeyed the Lord our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants, the prophets.

All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. Now, Daniel will come back to God's mercy and forgiveness in a moment.

But do you notice that throughout this section, Daniel prays, we, we sinned, we have not obeyed. When what we've seen of Daniel so far is that he has obeyed God, hasn't he?

He's been like the model Jew. It's as though Daniel here stands as Israel's representative and confesses their sins on their behalf. In fact, it's as though he actually takes on their sin, even though he is innocent.

And I wonder if that reminds you of anyone else. And I suspect he needs to do this because it seems that Israel as a nation has not. So if you just go down to the verse 13, he talks about the fact that this judgment was what God promised in the first place through the law of Moses in places like Deuteronomy and the like.

[10 : 38] And then he says, halfway through verse 13, yet despite judgment coming on us as God promised, yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord, our God, by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth.

It seems like Israel as a nation has not yet turned back to God. And so Daniel confesses on their behalf and then asks for forgiveness as well. So come with me to verse 15.

Verse 15. He turns from confession to forgiveness. He says, 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.

Lord, in keeping with your righteous acts, like bring us out of Egypt, 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.

Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary or temple. Give ear, our God, and hear, open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your name.

[11 : 56] We do not make the requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. 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. You see, Daniel, he prays that God might forgive Israel and restore the city of Jerusalem.

Just as he saved Israel from Egypt, verse 15, just as he did righteous acts to bring them and make them his people, so Daniel says, again, God, forgive Israel and again, make us your people.

Not because they deserve it, did you notice? See the last bit of verse 18? He says, not because we are righteous or have done good deeds, but because of your mercy.

In other words, Daniel appeals not to any good works they have done, but only to God's mercy and it's the same for us today, is it not? When it comes to forgiveness and being restored or reconciled to God, it does not depend on how many good things we have done.

[13 : 04] It depends on God's mercy in Christ. I will come back to that later. But for now, did you also notice Daniel's greatest concern here? It's actually for God's name.

You see, he is concerned in verse 16 for the people and Jerusalem, yes, they've both become an object of scorn and ridicule, verse 16. So people would laugh at those Jews and tell jokes about Jerusalem.

You know, it was the suburb that no one wanted to live in despite cheap property prices. Daniel is even, he's concerned about those things, but Daniel is more concerned that it reflects badly on God's name.

You see, Israel and Jerusalem both bear God's name, verse 18. And so what happens to them reflects on God. It's the same with children and parents, is it not? And one of the reasons parents get so embarrassed when their children misbehave is because, well, it's their children, they bear their name.

It's why when children muck up, one parent will often say to the other, they get that from your side of the family. So that the bad behavior doesn't reflect on them, you see. And here, what happens to Israel and Jerusalem reflects badly on God because they bear God's name.

[14:18] So if they are in exile and their city is in ruins, then either God is not powerful, was not powerful enough to save them, or God does not love them enough to care, or he wasn't worth enough to follow.

And so people have followed other gods and been punished. Either way you cut it, God's name is brought into disrepute, it is mocked. And so Daniel prays that people might be forgiven, Jerusalem might be restored, not just for the sake of the people, but verse 17, he says, for your sake, Lord, look with favor.

Or verse 19, for your sake, my God, do not delay. See, Daniel's greatest concern is for God's name to be honored. But the question we've only started to answer is, why does Daniel pray like this after reading the promise in Jeremiah?

Why doesn't he pack his bags with excitement and pray, oh, hurry up God, we're almost there, or something like that? Why does he spend so much time confessing and begging for forgiveness? Well, because he knows sin is the big problem. Sin is what broke the relationship in the first place and landed them in exile. So sin is what needs to be wiped clean to restore the relationship first so that God can keep this particular promise.

[15:41] Sure, God could just simply bring Israel back to the land and they could simply just start rebuilding the city, but without a restored relationship, it won't be God's city and Israel won't be God's people.

There won't be a restored relationship, you see. And so Daniel knows for God to truly keep this particular promise of restoration, sin must be wiped clean and so that's why he prays for forgiveness first.

And his prayer, well, it's answered. Point three, verse 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, Jerusalem, while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I'd seen in the earlier vision, last week in chapter 8, came to me in swift flight about the time of evening sacrifice.

He instructed me and said to me, Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I've come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed.

Therefore, consider the word and understand the vision. So here, Daniel begins the vision by seeing Gabriel, whom he saw last week.

[16:56] And did you notice, in fact, in verse 23, that the answer Gabriel has for Daniel's prayer comes as soon as Daniel started to pray.

Do you notice that? Verse 23. It's as though God couldn't even wait for Daniel to finish praying before he answered the prayer. When I pray, it can sometimes feel like my prayer went via snail mail or got lost in the post because it seems like God takes so long to answer.

And yet the picture we are given here is one where God can't wait to answer prayer. Of course, the answer can be no or not yet or yes, but not how you think.

And so it feels like God doesn't answer or takes a long time to answer when he actually doesn't. But for Daniel, Gabriel is sent so that Daniel knows his prayer has been answered and more than that, so he knows how it will be answered to give him understanding, he says.

So what's the answer? Well, it starts in verse 24. He says, 77s 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.

[18:21] So we'll just pause here in verse 24 for a moment. Here, Daniel is told not only that Israel and his city or the people and the city will be restored, and that's the first phrase there, that your holy city to finish transgression, but he's actually told that God will do something more.

He will do more than that. In fact, he will not only restore Israel and Jerusalem, he will put an end to the sin that put them in the exile in the first place.

So do you see the next three phrases? He says, I will put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, and to bring everlasting righteousness. In other words, God is saying, I will deal with sin once and for all so that there'll be ongoing forgiveness, always available, so that I'll never have to judge my people again and send them to exile again.

And when will all this happen? When will he seal up this vision? In other words, fulfill this vision. That's what the word seal up means. It means to stamp it as though it's complete, kind of like when you go to the post office with your electricity bill or gas bill and you pay for the money and they've got the stamp that says paid on it.

They stamp the bill as though it's fulfilled. When will this vision be stamped or fulfilled? Well, verse 24, 77's time.

[19 : 45] You see, the 70 years of Jeremiah where God will restore Israel, it seems like God is saying, well, it points to a 77's where God will do more than just restore Israel.

He will restore people in a greater way. He will deal with sin once and for all. Now, we need to remember that this sort of writing is called apocalyptic and so numbers are written in a more symbolic than literal way and the number seven often means perfect.

So, 77's refers to a perfect amount of time when God will do this. But, it will evolve steps. It will be a process. And so, as the vision continues, these 77's are broken down into different steps.

So, turn the page with me and let's have a look at how it's broken down. Verse 25, he says, no one 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 62 sevens.

It, Jerusalem, will be rebuilt with streets and a trench but in times of trouble. After the 62 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.

[21 : 05] The end will come like a flood. War will continue until the end and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a strong, the word strong is missing there for some reason, a strong covenant with many for one seven.

And 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.

You got all that? It's clear? We can go home now? One Bible scholar I was reading said that these verses here are the hardest in the whole Old Testament to understand.

Aren't you glad you came today? Now, of course, Daniel would have understood some of this. For example, in verse 25, a word going out to rebuild Jerusalem. That's understandable.

That would have been encouraging for him. He would have understood that the city would be built in times of trouble. We can make sense of that, even though that would have been discouraging. Or verse 26, that God's anointed one, which is literally the Messiah, the Christ, that's what the word is, Messiah, will be put to death, that sacrifices would end, that the temple would be destroyed again, and that there's no mention of it being rebuilt.

[22 : 22] Daniel would have understood those things, though they would have been alarming to him. But I doubt he would have understood what the seven sevens and the 62 sevens were. I mean, was Daniel supposed to get out his calculator or abacus and start adding them together and to work out when all this would happen?

You know, seven sevens, the 49 plus 62, carry the one. No. In fact, no one understands this bit. Scholars can't even agree on whether the sevens represent a week or years or something else. I was racking my brain about it all this week and then I realized, well, if we don't understand, if Daniel's not going to understand, then perhaps we're not meant to. Rather, what we're meant to understand from the numbers is that God has a plan.

And that's why there are specific times given, different steps given, you see. It's as though they are steps in God's plan. The numbers are not so that Daniel can add them up on his fingers and toes and calculate how long it will be.

Rather, so that he and we might know that God is not flying by the seat of his pants. As though he's making it up as he goes. Rather, God has mapped it out. He knows what will happen and when.

[23 : 33] And his plan will unfold in his perfect timing. Hence the number seven for perfect. That's what Daniel and we are meant to understand from the numbers.

And looking back in history, we can work out even more than Daniel could work out. I mean, Daniel knew that Jerusalem would be rebuilt and he only had to wait one more year because the following

year a word did go out to rebuild Jerusalem.

Darius, who was also called Cyrus, he had two names, he issued a decree for the Jews to go home and rebuild their temple and city. In fact, on the next slide is what's called the Cyrus Cylinder, which is a stone cylinder in the British Museum and in between those kind of ribbed lines, you can't see it, but it's actually writing carved into the stone and the writing contains the command of Cyrus for all people to return home.

Exactly what we see here in the Bible. To build their temples. And mind you, he gave the command rather selfishly. It was so that they could go home, rebuild the temple and then pray to their gods for him and his long life.

But they got home nonetheless. And the temple and the city was built in times of trouble. And so if you go to the next slide, Sue, we read in Nehemiah when they're building the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah says, half my men did the work while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor.

[25 : 04] Because if you read the surrounding verses, there was times of trouble. As they tried to rebuild the city. And then in verse 26 of your Bibles, the anointed one, literally the Messiah, was put to death and had nothing at that moment.

And we know who that is, don't we? Jesus, the Messiah, was crucified, cut off from the land of the living. And at the cross, he had nothing. He was, you know, being stripped of his clothes, his disciples had left him.

And at the moment of his death, when he took the punishment for our sin, even his father forsook him. He had nothing at that moment, you see. Of course, he rose again and things changed.

And then after the rest of, well, the rest of verse 26 in your Bibles, we know from history books that there was a people and a ruler who came and who did destroy the temple and the city.

The people were the Romans and the ruler was this guy on the next slide, a guy called Titus. His bust is in the British Museum today. He came and destroyed the city of Jerusalem in 70 AD, just 40 years after Jesus was crucified.

[26 : 13] In fact, in Italy, on the next slide, there's an arch called the Titus Arch dedicated to his triumph over Jerusalem. And on the next slide, inside the arch, there's this relief or this sculpting.

It's a bit hard to see, so on the next slide is a closer picture of it. And you can see the Romans carrying off things to the temple. Do you see the candelabra, the Jewish candelabra there in the middle? They're carrying off the things from the temple.

It celebrates the destruction of Jerusalem. And to this day, the temple has never been rebuilt. And in verse 27, it's a bit hard, it's a bit tricky, the translation in the NIV isn't all that helpful.

The he is probably referring to two different people. So in verse 27, he, it's probably the anointed one, still, will confirm a strong covenant with many for one seven.

So Jesus did make a new covenant. And it was a strong one because people's sin wasn't going to break it again. There'd be ongoing forgiveness, you see, always available to wipe sin clean and keep the covenant of love intact.

[27 : 18] Which means there was no longer any need for sacrifices or offerings. Sin had been dealt with through the anointed one and his death. And then the he in the rest of 27 is probably a different person.

It's probably General Titus again, who destroyed the temple and his soldiers worshipped their Roman gods inside the temple. That's the abomination. And Titus will come to an end.

In fact, the history books tell us that two years after he became emperor and then he died suddenly at age 41. You see, God not only kept his promise of restoration in Jeremiah the way Daniel was thinking, you know, forgiving Israel, bringing them back out of exile to the city, but he also kept his promise of this greater restoration in Christ where sin would be dealt with once for all.

Wickedness would be atoned for. There would be everlasting righteousness on offer. For as we heard in our second reading, God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement to pay for our sins so that we can be forgiven, made right with God.

In the words of Daniel, we can have everlasting righteousness with God. And as we heard in our second reading, this promise of restoration is open to all who believe in Jesus, the anointed one.

[28 : 39] So the first question for us this morning is, do you, like Daniel, have you humbly confessed your sins to God and asked for forgiveness?

