

A Precious Man

HEARTS FULL OF IDOLS. Have you ever thought that worshipping idols is a dumb idea? Have you ever thought the Israelites in the Old Testament were stupid for worshipping a god called Baal (2Ki 10:23) or Astoreth (1 Kings 11:33)? They were just idols. Idols made out of metal, wood, stone, or pottery. They did not see, hear, walk, talk, speak, or comb their hair. Yet people worshipped them because they believed there was a benefit in doing it. In Ezekiel 14:3, God said to the Israelites, “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts . . .” The issue for God was not so much the material idols before them but the emotional idols in their hearts. An idol is not necessarily an image of gold, but a cold or indifferent heart to God. It may be the fruit of the womb, or a man’s wife; it may be the absence of money, success, position, respect, food, leisure, physical appearance, health, or pleasure. An idol is anything that occupies the attention of your heart more than God. The hearts of the Israelites went after other gods, and so God brought pain into their lives. Have you ever suffered and felt it was too much or too unreasonable?

READING JEREMIAH. As we come to Daniel 9, we find that Daniel had been reading in the scrolls of Jeremiah during the first year of Darius the Mede, who was king over Babylon and the former empire of the Chaldeans. Notice that he was “made king.” He was made king by Cyrus the Persian, who was the king over the entire Medo-Persian empire.

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans - in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. (NASB) Dan. 9:1-3

The Hebrew word for books actually means “writings.” In those days Daniel would have been reading a parchment scroll: the book of Jeremiah. Daniel

discovered that God had predicted that the Jewish people who had been deported from Jerusalem to Babylon would be in captivity for seventy years.

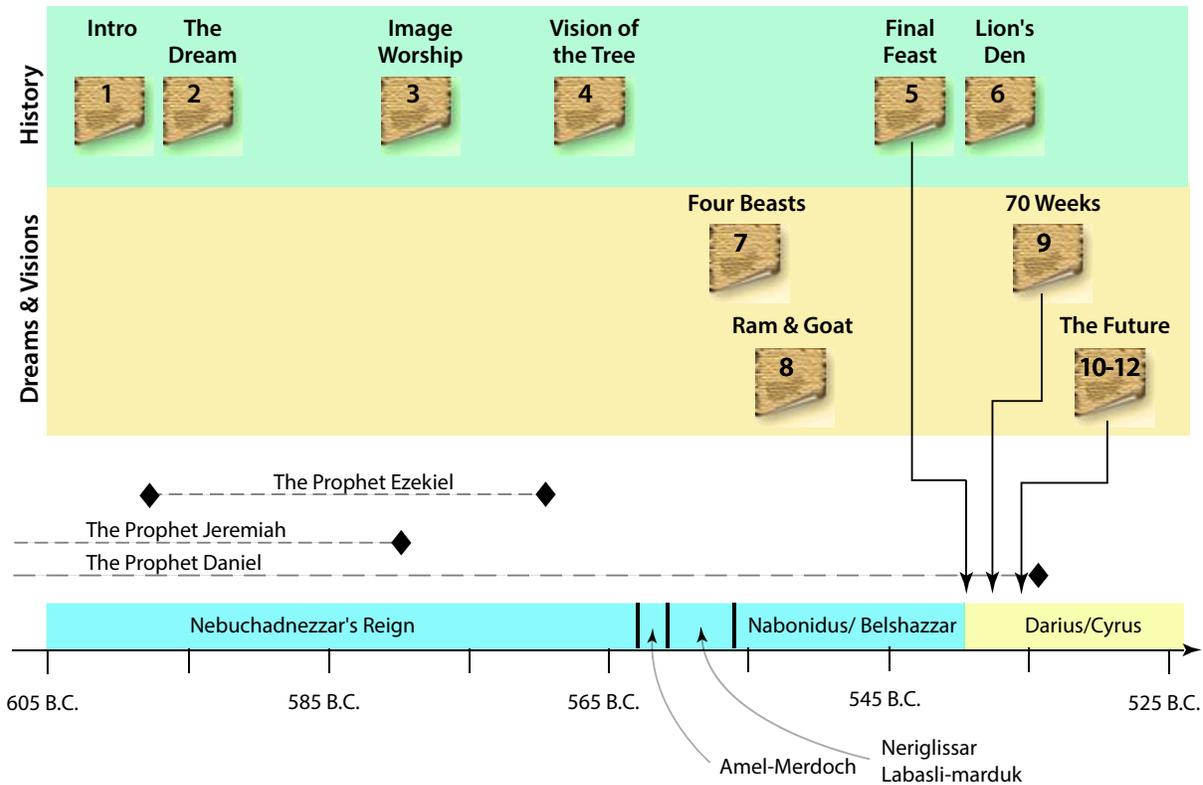
There are two passages in Jeremiah that Daniel must have read. Here is the first one.

Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, “Because you have not obeyed My words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north . . . and I will send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, and against its inhabitants, and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them, and make them a horror, and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. And this whole land shall be a desolation and a horror, and these nations shall serve the king

of Babylon seventy years. Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,” declares the LORD, “for their iniquity, and the land of the



Outline of Daniel



Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation.” (NASB)

Jer. 25:8-12

God’s message was clear. They had disobeyed Him and so they were going into captivity. Suffering was coming and not gladness. What a sad message! People often question God’s love and kindness. They wonder why He causes or allows pain and suffering. The answer is simple. He had warned them over and over again and they refused to change. They were disobeying God. Later in Jeremiah God repeats His promise that He would end their suffering after seventy years.

For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, “Do not let your prophets who are in your midst . . . they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them,” declares the LORD. For thus says the LORD, “When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.” (NASB) Jer. 29:8-10

Their prophets were liars and were preaching what felt good. They were dynamic, inspired, empowered, and anointed prophets but with their own inspiration and not that of God.

... prophesy against the prophets of Israel . . . who prophesy from their own inspiration, “Listen to the word of the LORD! Thus says the Lord GOD, “Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing.” (NASB) Ezekiel 13:2-3

Their prophets and priests were men of the word - their own “word.” After reading Jeremiah, Daniel started praying and confessing the sins of his people.

WHY SEVENTY YEARS? Seventy years of discipline is a long time. Have you ever wondered why your discipline went on for so long? You knew that you had done wrong. You knew that you had sinned and disobeyed God. You sensed the punishment was related to your sin because the

Holy Spirit gave you that sense, but the length of the pain and the amount of the suffering seemed to be too long and too hard. It did not seem fair.

The Israelites probably had some of the same thoughts. Why was it so long? Part of the answer is found in 2 Chronicles 36:20-21.

And those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete. (NASB) 2 Chronicles 36:20-21

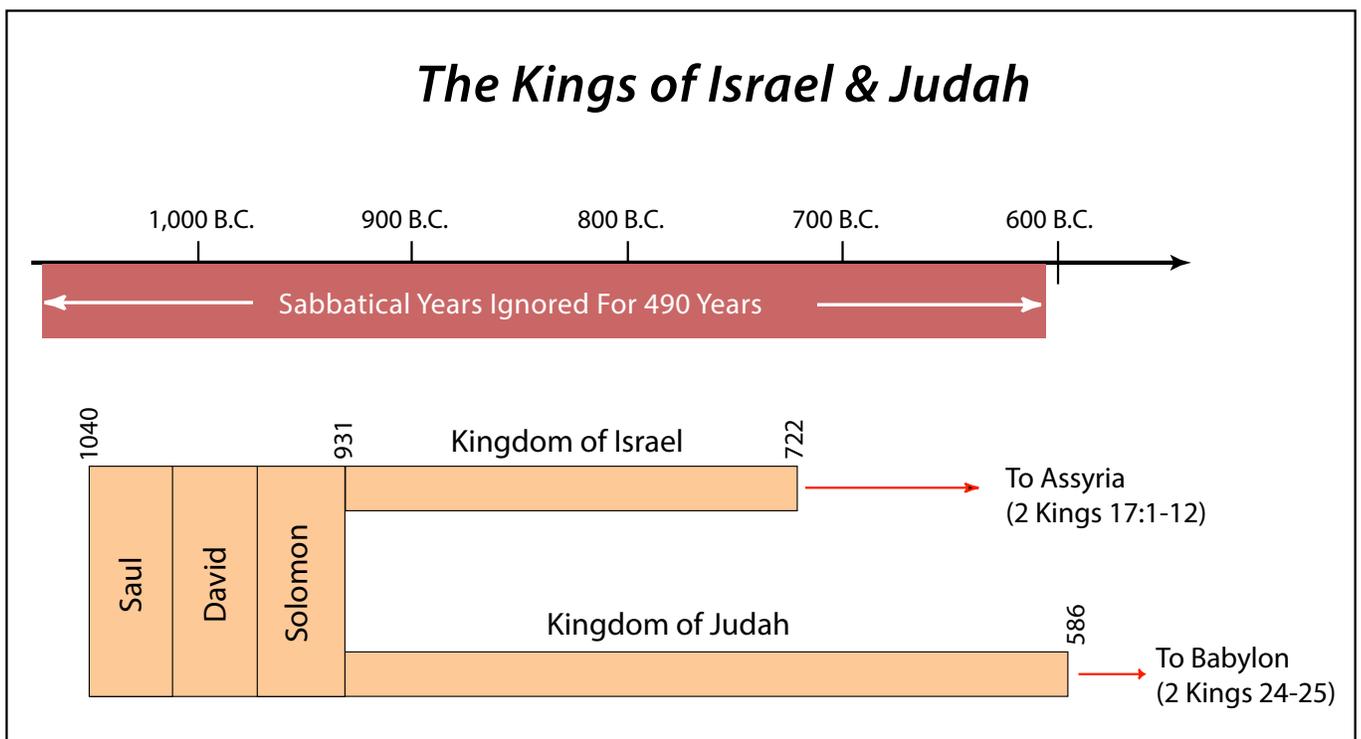
They had been ignoring the Sabbatical Year during which the land was not to be farmed, according to Leviticus 25:4-5; 26:27-46. God had told the Israelites to farm the land for six years and then to let the land rest in the seventh year. They did not do this and had farmed the land every year for 490 years. That means they violated the Sabbatical Rests for seventy years (one every seven years). Consequently, God would allow the land to rest by sending them into captivity for an equal period of time.

DANIEL’S ATTITUDE. Daniel responds by praying to God. This was not a formality or something he did to impress God. Daniel was serious and God knew it because God knows our thoughts and heart’s attitudes (Ezekiel 11:5).

And I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed and said, “Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and loving kindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly, and rebelled, even turning aside from Thy commandments and ordinances.” (NASB) Dan. 9:4-5

He prayed for others. What a wonderful man of God! He did not mind confessing the sins of others as if they were his own. The Hebrew word that Daniel uses for “confess” means to “admit.” He admitted that they were sinners who had wronged God. He used a group of unique Hebrew words which are translated as iniquity, wicked, rebelled, and turned aside. A better sense of the meanings are that they were “twisted or distorted,” “criminals,” “insubordinate,” and had committed “apostasy.” They were evil people!

DID NOT LISTEN TO THE LEADERS. What sins? We know about some, but listen to Daniel’s prayer.



Moreover, we have not listened to Thy servants the prophets, who spoke in Thy name to our kings, our princes, our fathers, and all the people of the land. Righteousness belongs to Thee, O Lord, but to us open shame, as it is this day - to the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are nearby and those who are far away in all the countries to which Thou hast driven them, because of their unfaithful deeds which they have committed against Thee. (NASB) Dan. 9:6-7

Did you notice that Daniel included himself in “we”?

DID NOT LISTEN TO THE PROPHETS. Not only did they not listen to the prophets, priests, and their elders, they did not listen to God.

To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him; nor have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His teachings which He set before us through His servants the prophets. (NASB) Dan. 9:9-10

Daniel says they did not listen to the prophets. That is true. They had not listened to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, Hosea,

They ignored His teachings. They ignored God.

DID NOT LISTEN TO GOD. They did not listen to God’s

Reasons We Suffer



Nahum and Ezekiel. In Ezekiel and Lamentations we discover that they ignored the prophets and priests and did not honor the elders (Ezek. 33:29-33; Lam. 4:16).

Who rejected the prophets according to Daniel? The people, their fathers, and their kings. Does God discipline us for the sins of our nation, grandparents, and parents? The answer is yes!

DANIEL’S RESPONSE IS HUMBLING. He told God that he was “shamed faced.” He was ashamed of their past.

Open shame belongs to us, O Lord, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against Thee. (NASB) Dan. 9:6-8

voice and now Daniel adds that they did not listen to one they admired so much - Moses.

Indeed all Israel has transgressed Thy law and turned aside, not obeying Thy voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him. Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity; for under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what was done to Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us; yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our iniquity and giving attention to Thy

truth. (NASB) Dan. 9:11-13

Moses had warned them that disobedience would end up in pain and suffering. It is no different today. Many people ignore God. If they do not like what the Bible says, they keep looking until they find someone who tells them what they want to hear. We want a god that we can agree with - a god we like.

These things you have done, and I kept silence; You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you, . . . (NASB) Ps. 50:21

CALAMITY STORED UP. Daniel's next statement is a surprise to all of us.

Therefore, the LORD has kept the calamity in store and brought

merciful and not eager to cause us pain.

STOP! So Daniel asks God to stop, not because the people are good but because He is loving and merciful.

And now, O Lord our God, who hast brought Thy people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and hast made a name for Thyself, as it is this day - we have sinned, we have been wicked. O Lord, in accordance with all Thy righteous acts, let now Thine anger and Thy wrath turn away from Thy city Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain; for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Thy people have become a reproach to all those around us. So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Thy servant and to his supplications, and for Thy sake, O Lord, let Thy face shine on Thy desolate sanctuary. O my God, incline Thine ear and hear! Open Thine eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Thy name; for we are not presenting our

The Bitterest of All

This is the bitterest of all - to know that suffering need not have been;
that it has resulted from indiscretion and inconsistency;
that it is the harvest of one's own sowing;
that the vulture which feeds on the vitals is a nestling of one's own rearing.
Ah, me! this is pain!

- F. B. Meyer. Christ in Isaiah.

it on us; for the LORD our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice. (NASB) Dan. 9:14

God has just answered our earlier question, "Have you ever wondered why your discipline went on for so long?" It helps us understand why the length of pain and suffering may seem too long and too hard. God stores up our pain and suffering when we refuse to stop sinning. Daniel said that God "kept the calamity in store and brought it on us."

The answer is that God does not usually bring immediate pain and suffering into our lives when we sin. Sometimes it seems like we have escaped the penalty of our sin. He is waiting for us to stop and confess our sins. He is loving and

supplications before Thee on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Thy great compassion. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Thine own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name. (NASB) Dan. 9:15-19

If we are suffering because of our own sins, we need to admit our rebellion to God and ask for His forgiveness because of His love and mercy.

CONCLUSION. At the beginning of Daniel's prayer, the angel Gabriel had been sent to Daniel. He was coming to explain the vision Daniel had seen. It took the angel time to reach Daniel. When he arrived Gabriel said that the reason he had been sent was that Daniel was "precious."

Now while I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God in behalf of the holy mountain of my God, while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in my extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering. And he gave me instruction and talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding. At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed; so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision." (NASB) Dan. 9:20-23

The Hebrew word for "highly esteemed" has the idea of precious. That was God's view of Daniel. What a contrast. This precious man prayed for the sins of others as though they were his own.

Daniel was part of a special group - a small group men who were special to God. There have been certain men that God has highly respected because of their heart for Him. Men like Enoch, Moses, Elijah, Abraham, the apostle John, and Daniel. God had taken Enoch because he was righteous. Elijah was taken up in a flaming chariot and did not see death. Moses talked with God and Abraham was called the

friend of God (James 2:23). The apostle John was the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 21:20). Daniel? He was precious to God - precious because he longed for God. He prayed every day. He read scripture. He pursued righteousness. He was a man of faith. The just shall live not by effort but by faith.

Would you like to be Jesus' friend? Jesus told His disciples how.

You are My friends, if you do what I command you. (NASB) John 15:14

Now that is a close relationship with God. One who longs for God WANTS to do this. A person once said, "A true friend is one who dislikes the same things you dislike." Do you like what Jesus likes? He wants your time and your heart.

When I look away, I forget.

When I forget, I sin.

When I sin, I suffer.

When I suffer, I seek Him again.

When I seek Him again, I confess.

When I confess, He lovingly forgives.

And we are friends again.