



DANIEL 9:1-19

1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans— 2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. 3 Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. 4 I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 5 we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. 6 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. 7 To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. 8 To us, O LORD, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. 9 To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him 10 and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. 11 All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him. 12 He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity. For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem. 13 As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not entreated the favor of the LORD our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth. 14 Therefore the LORD has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in all the works that he has done, and we have not obeyed his voice. 15 And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly. 16 "O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill, because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us. 17 Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. 18 O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. 19 O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name."

STRUCTURE:

- I. **Setup: Divine timing for Daniel to understand and Israel to be restored (1-2)**
 - a. *Timing of Daniel's illumination of the Scripture:* the first year of Darius (1-2a)
 - b. *Timing of Jeremiah's prophecy nearing fulfillment:* seventy years of desolation (2b)
- II. **Response: Daniel repents and prays on behalf of all Israel (3-19)**
 - a. *Prayer summarized:* Fasting, petition, and confession (3-4a)
 - b. *Prayer recorded (4b-19):*
 - i. Address and praise to God: God is awesome and loyal to the covenant (4b)
 - ii. Confession to God (5-14):
 1. Israel rejected the covenant word preached by the prophets (5-10)
 2. Israel received the covenant curses written by Moses (11-14)
 - iii. Renewed address and praise to God: He is the Redeemer who brought Israel out of Egypt (15)
 - iv. Petition to God (16-19):
 1. Show righteousness and mercy as you did in Egypt (16)
 2. Make your face shine as you did through Aaron's blessing (17)
 3. Hear, see, forgive, and act for your name's sake (18-19)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

As with Daniel's visions, he marks this episode according to the year of a particular king and empire. Uniquely, however, this section does not begin with a fresh prophetic revelation. It begins with Jeremiah's former revelation, recorded in Scripture. This passage portrays Daniel as a man steeped in the Word of God. After reading and responding to Jeremiah 25 and 29, his prayer will echo Exodus 9, 32; Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 4, 7, 28, 30; 1 Kings 8; and 2 Chronicles 6, 36. In this, we observe the source of Daniel's wisdom. As it says in Psalm 119:98-100: *"Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts."*

The emphasis on Scripture not only highlights the source of Daniel's wisdom but also the cause of Israel's calamity. Israel has been unfaithful to the covenant recorded in Scripture and reinforced by the prophets (vv. 5-14). In contrast, God has been faithful to the covenant. On the one hand, he faithfully brought on Israel the curses for sustained rebellion outlined in Leviticus 26:14-39 and Deuteronomy 28:15-68. On the other hand, he had also promised that after exile, if Israel returned to him, he would show mercy, remember his covenant, gather his people, and restore them (Lev. 26:40-45; Deut. 4:29-31; 30:1-10). In short, God's faithfulness to his people is rooted in faithfulness to his word. This explains why it could take different forms—judgment or restoration—depending on Israel's covenant response.

Daniel models the right covenant response through repentance. A few characteristics stand out. First, he repents in response to Scripture. Jeremiah had predicted that Jerusalem will lie desolate for seventy years, until God judges Babylon. At the sixty-six year mark, Daniel reads that prophecy and recognizes that only half of the prophecy has been fulfilled: Babylon had fallen; Jerusalem had not been restored. Therefore, he repents and prays for the promised restoration. Second, Daniel repents with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. All three commonly portray mourning. The prophet's repentance is not half-hearted; it's full of emotion, which he wears on his sleeve. He owns his sin, without making excuses or blaming God for his suffering. Third, Daniel bases his repentance on God's character, as revealed in Scripture. He begins his prayer by praising God for his "great and awesome" name and for his "steadfast love"—his affectionate loyalty to Israel's covenant. In verse 15, he recalls God's faithfulness to Israel in Egypt, ultimately asking for an Exodus 2.0. Finally, Daniel repents on behalf of all Israel.

This is significant for two reasons. First, only the southern kingdom had been exiled to Babylon, yet Daniel includes the northern tribes in his prayer. These tribes had been exiled by Assyria more than a century prior, but Daniel refuses to remain partisan. His prayer anticipates a restoration larger than Judah alone. God's heart is for unity; so is Daniel's.

More strikingly, Daniel identifies himself with Israel's guilt. The book presents him as extraordinarily faithful, yet in only sixteen verses Daniel identifies himself with sinful Israel nearly forty times through the language of "we," "us," and "our." A similar pattern occurs in Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 9. Individualistic western cultures feel puzzled over this, but there is such a thing as corporate solidarity, guilt, and confession. This does not mean that Daniel is personally owning every sin that Israel committed, nor does it mean that Israel's sin mechanically transfers from the community onto individuals. Instead, it means that he belongs to a covenant people whose rebellion incurred covenant judgment. He confesses both as an individual sinner and as a member of the rebellious nation.

Daniel's repentance highlights the uniqueness of chapter 9 within the apocalyptic second half of the book. Other chapters picture beastly governments and tyrannical leaders. They reveal how God will deal with the sin of godless pagans. But chapter 9 answers a different question: How will God deal with the sins of his own chosen people? Daniel models the appropriate covenant response: repentance. Restoration of Jerusalem and the temple require such a response.

Yet, Israel needs more than improved architecture or a trip home. They even need more than repentance. Daniel can confess sin for days on end, but he can never *atone* for it. The answer to sin is the Cross of Jesus Christ. Its effects stretch all the way back to Adam; they extend all the way forward to the end of age. Daniel's prayer prepares him for Gabriel's revelation in 9:24-27, where God promises not merely to end exile but to atone for sin through the Messiah.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—

—"In the first year":

- The visions of Daniel 7 and 8 occurred during a time of transition, while Belshazzar reigned, the last seated ruler in the city of Babylon.
- Now, during another time of transition, God speaks again. Daniel 5:30-31 summarizes the radical shift: *"That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old."*

- Why does God speak to Daniel during times of transition? To be clear, he speaks at other times too, such as through Nebuchadnezzar's dreams in Dan. 2 and 4. But ever since the apocalyptic vision of Dan. 7—where four beasts emerged from a wind-tossed sea—God has emphasized tumult and transition. We might interpret this as an act of mercy. God is comforting his children by providing his perspective on the chaos. As radical as it felt when Belshazzar was slain and replaced, God reigned above the chaos. And he directs world history toward his desired outcome.

—“Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede”:

- In Daniel 5, he was called “Darius the Mede.” We have no extrabiblical evidence of this person. History knows Cyrus as Babylon's conqueror. Other Scriptures, including Daniel 1:21, 6:28, and 10:1, likewise name Cyrus.
- Some have speculated that Darius was another name, or even a title, for Cyrus. Ancient kings often went by various names and titles, but 6:28 indicates two distinct individuals: “So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.” Furthermore, Scripture repeatedly identifies Darius as a Mede and Cyrus as a Persian. Some respond that Cyrus' mother was a Mede, but 9:1 emphasizes paternal Median descent. That response seems like a stretch to me.
- Others believe Darius served under Cyrus. This seems to me the most likely. History records that Cyrus did not reign from Babylon, and he was known to govern through subordinate officials. This fits with Darius ruling Babylon as Cyrus' subordinate.
- “Ahasuerus”: This is the same Hebrew name used of the Persian king Xerxes in Esther, though this cannot be the same individual, since Esther's Ahasuerus lived generations later. The identity of Darius' father remains unknown.
- “by descent a Mede”: Again, this seems to distinguish him from “Cyrus the Persian.”

—“who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans”: This language coheres with the theory that Darius was a subordinate king to Cyrus. Cyrus reigned over more than “the realm of the Chaldeans.” He reigned over the Median and Persian territories to the north/east too. It makes sense that Darius was “made king” over a recently conquered realm by the appointment of Cyrus or one of his officials. Meanwhile, Cyrus would have reigned over the entire territory, of which Babylon was part.

2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

—“I, Daniel”: We continue to observe that the apocalyptic section of Daniel records the prophet's experiences in the first-person. This differs from the narrative section, which is told in the third person. Daniel uses many literary techniques for distinguishing the two halves of the book.

—“perceived in the books... Jeremiah the prophet”:

- How interesting! Daniel's pattern is to identify the year and the reign of a particular king, after which he relays a vision he received (7:1; 8:1; 10:1). Here, however, his “revelation” is not visionary. It is the Bible! What is the significance of this?
 - **Daniel the prophet is a student of prophecy.** He is not a rogue prophet, inflated by his own visions (cf. Col. 2:18).
 - **Daniel is a student of Scripture.** He studied Jeremiah, whose prophecies were rooted in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Later, Daniel will recall the Exodus memory. He will also recite portions of Solomon's prayer of temple dedication. See Lev. 26:33–35; Deut. 28:36–37, 64–68; Jer. 25:11–12; 29:10; Exod. 32:11–13; Deut. 4:34; 1 Kings 8:46–53; 2 Chron. 6:36–39.
 - **Daniel is marking a literary center.**
 - Biblical authors communicate not only through words but through structure. Daniel 8 is a vision about Medo-Persia and Greece. So is Daniel 10–12. Sandwiched in the middle is Daniel 9. The focus here is less on Israel's enemies than Israel itself. God has already shown how he will deal with the “beasts.” But how will he deal with the sins of his own chosen people? This is the focus of Daniel 9. The Bible-reading episode marks it as unique. Israel's sins will be dealt with by God's sovereign redemption (9:24–27), while Daniel models the response required of God's people: hearing God's written word, confessing their sin, and pleading for his covenant mercy (9:1–23).
 - Daniel's prayer, which fills most of this chapter, positions us for Gabriel's answer in 9:24–27. Israel needs more than a trip home; it needs spiritual restoration. Daniel's prayer displays Israel's side of restoration; Gabriel's answer reveals God's side. Fundamentally, Israel's greatest problem is not Babylon. It's sin. THAT level of restoration will require much more than Daniel's, “We're sorry.” It will require the cutting off of an anointed one (9:26)—of Jesus.

- Note: Even though Daniel does not record a vision at first, he gradually does record an encounter with the angel Gabriel. Still, Daniel 9 breaks the pattern of "In the year of _____, I had a vision."
- What part of Jeremiah was Daniel reading?
 - Jer. 25:11-12: *"This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste."*
 - Jer. 29:10, 12-14: *"For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ... Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 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 I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile."*
 - Jeremiah 25 teaches that Judah and the surrounding nations (Philistia, Edom, Moab, Tyre, Sidon, etc.) would be subjugated to Babylon for seven decades, after which Babylon and its king would be judged. Daniel lived through these events, culminating with the recent fall of Belshazzar, king of Babylon. He must have read the text and thought, "Wait, Babylon has already fallen. God's word came true!" But then he reads Jer. 29.
 - Jeremiah 29 moves beyond Babylon's judgment to Israel's restoration. It predicts Israel's repentance and return from exile. This part of Jeremiah's prophecy had not yet happened. Therefore, his humble prayer participates in the restoration of Jeremiah 29.
- "end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years":
 - I have already cited Jeremiah's references to seventy years.
 - Still, there is disagreement about when the clock started and stopped:
 - 605→538/39 BC: from Daniel's deportation to Babylon's fall and Cyrus's decree to return to Jerusalem. This is only about 66/67 actual years, so the "seventy" is usually understood as an approximation. Daniel 9 occurs right near its end.
 - 586→516 BC: From the destruction of the temple to its rebuilding—a neat 70 years. This would seem to align well with Zechariah 1 and 7 (see below), where "these seventy years" stretches to around the time of the temple's completion. However, it does not align as well with Jeremiah's prophecy, which appears to mark the end of the 70 years with Babylon's fall (539 BC).
 - Symbolic 70 years: Since it's unclear when the prophetic clock starts/stops, some argue for a symbolic interpretation of 70 years. Support for this interpretation is found especially in the number itself: 7 and 10 are both numbers of completion, and the 70 years mark the "completion" of God's judgment of Jerusalem.
 - Other relevant passages about the 70 years:
 - 2 Chron. 36:20-23: *"He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment 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 that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: 'Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.'"*
 - Zech. 1:12: *"Then the angel of the LORD said, 'O LORD of hosts, how long will you have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, against which you have been angry these seventy years?'"*
 - Zech. 7:5: *"Say to all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted?'"*
 - How do we synthesize this biblical data? I'm not willing to accept that "70 years means multiple different timeframes."

- The Chronicler connects the seventy years both with Judah's servitude and the land's desolation, but then explicitly says Jeremiah's word is fulfilled when Cyrus rises and permits the return—538 BC, **not when the temple is completed in 516**.
- Zechariah 1 views the same period from Jerusalem's perspective. In 520 BC, the angel describes God's anger against Jerusalem as lasting "these seventy years." That is roughly, not precisely, seventy years from Jerusalem's destruction in 586.
- In 518 BC, Zechariah 7 refers to the people fasting and mourning "these seventy years." The fifth-month fast commemorated the temple's destruction in 586—about 68 years earlier.
- At first glance, Zechariah and Jeremiah/Chronicles seem to contradict one another. Jeremiah/Chronicles apparently depict 538/39 BC as the conclusion of the seventy years (when Babylon falls and Cyrus issues the decree to rebuild the temple). Zechariah seems to envision more like 516 BC (when the temple is actually finished... his prophecies about "these seventy years" occur a few years before that, so this is an inference). So which is it?
- I think the Jeremiah/Chronicles texts, paired with Daniel 9, clearly point to an approximate 70 years that aligns with the first deportation to Babylon as a starting point and Cyrus' decree as a fulfillment.
- But how do we synthesize this with Zechariah, who can say "these seventy years" two decades after Cyrus' decree?
- I think I would say it like this: The seventy years represent the approximate era of Babylonian domination and Jerusalem's desolation. It began around 605 BC and reached its decisive turning point in 538-39 BC, when Babylon fell and Cyrus authorized the exiles to return and rebuild the temple—roughly 66 years. Although Cyrus's decree began that restoration, Jerusalem and the temple were not fully restored for some time. This helps explain why Zechariah could still speak, nearly two decades later, of "these seventy years." Biblical prophecy was not designed like modern stopwatches. It accounts for the messiness of history. It can mark real historical periods without requiring every consequence to land on a single chronological endpoint.
- Notably, this interpretation does more than harmonize the biblical and historical data. It provides a roadmap for interpreting the latter part of the passage about "seventy sevens." Interpreters must grow comfortable with prophetic approximations and transitions that occur over decades. Prophetic timeframes can identify a real historical era without requiring every aspect of the prophecy to occur at a single chronological endpoint. History is messier than that. A decisive fulfillment may inaugurate a period whose consequences unfold over decades.
- A reconstruction of Daniel's reality on the ground:
 - The year is 539 BC. Babylon has just fallen, and Medo-Persia has taken over.
 - Reading Jeremiah 25 and 29, Daniel realizes that Babylon's fall is part of a prophecy about a period of 70 years of judgment before Jerusalem is restored.
 - Daniel may not know precisely when that "clock" began, but he knows he's been exiled for about 66 years, and he starts praying. By 538 BC, Cyrus will issue a decree that the exiles can return home and build their temple.

3 Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. 4 I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 5 we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. 6 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.

—"Then I turned":

- The Word of God moves Daniel to pray to God.
- Daniel does not assume that since the prophecy is near fulfillment, God will automatically act. God's sovereignty is no excuse for complacency. One cannot say, "God is going to fulfill his plan regardless of whether I pray or evangelize, so I'll do neither of those things." Indeed, God will fulfill his plan. But he includes our participation within his plan. In other words, he ordains not only the destination but the journey, not just the end but the means to get there.

- We already saw this in Jeremiah 29, where God ordained not only Israel's restoration but the spiritual renewal that enabled them to participate in that restoration.
- “prayer... pleas for mercy... fasting and sackcloth and ashes”:
- We observe similar language throughout Daniel:
 - 2:18: Daniel urges his friends to “seek mercy from the God of heaven.”
 - Dan. 6:10: Daniel prays three times a day, giving thanks before God.
 - Dan. 6:11: His enemies find him “making petition and plea before his God.”
 - Dan. 10:2–3: Daniel mourns for three weeks, abstaining from delicacies, meat, wine, and anointing himself—commonly called “a Daniel fast.”
 - Fasting is associated with mourning and desperate prayer. Daniel mourns for his and Israel's sin, which led them into this predicament. His “pleas for mercy” are desperate, like a stranded man who sees a rescue plane. He does not tepidly wave at the plane; he shouts, screams, and flails his arms. This is a picture of Daniel before God. Having lived nearly seven decades amid pagans, persecutors, and tumultuous changes, he finds his “rescue plane” in God's promises.
 - “sackcloth and ashes” outwardly represent Daniel's inward state.
- “great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love”: Daniel moves toward confession, but he starts with God's greatness rather than his own sinfulness. The ground for our confession is a great and awesome covenant-keeping God, a God of steadfast love. If you think God rejects sinners, you'll go underground with your sin.
- “with those who love him and keep his commandments”:
- This sounds like, “God will be faithful to you if you are faithful to him.” If true, we're all toast! What is the meaning and heart behind this statement?
 - A key to understanding is the numerous allusions to Moses' writings in Dan. 9. Observe the following chart:

Daniel 9	Mosaic parallel	Correlation
Dan. 9:4 — “keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments”	Deut. 7:9 — “keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments”	Nearly verbatim covenant language
Dan. 9:5, 10–11 — “we have sinned... rebelled, turning aside from your commandments”; “we have not obeyed the voice of the LORD”	Deut. 28:15 — “if you will not obey the voice of the LORD”; Lev. 26:14–15 — “if you will not listen to me... spurn my statutes”	Israel has committed precisely the covenant rebellion Moses warned against
Dan. 9:7 — “all Israel... in all the lands to which you have driven them”	Deut. 4:27 — “the LORD will scatter you among the peoples”; Deut. 28:64 — “the LORD will scatter you among all peoples”	Israel's scattering fulfills the Mosaic covenant curse
Dan. 9:11 — “the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses ... have been poured out upon us”	Deut. 28:15ff.; Lev. 26:14ff. — covenant curses threatened for rebellion	Explicit appeal to Moses
Dan. 9:12 — God “confirmed his words... by bringing upon us a great calamity”	Lev. 26:31–33 — “I will lay your cities waste... scatter you among the nations”; Deut. 28:52 — “besiege you in all your towns”	Jerusalem's devastation is exactly the judgment Moses threatened
Dan. 9:13 — “As it is written in the Law of Moses , all this calamity has come upon us”	Deut. 28; Lev. 26	Second explicit identification of Israel's calamity as Mosaic covenant judgment
Dan. 9:13 — “we have not entreated the favor of the LORD... turning from our iniquities”	Lev. 26:40–42 — “if they confess their iniquity... then I will remember my covenant”; Deut. 4:29–31 — from exile they will “seek the LORD” and return because “the LORD your God is a merciful God”	Moses had anticipated not only exile but repentance and renewed seeking of God
Dan. 9:15 — “you... brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have made a name for yourself”	Exod. 32:11 — “your people, whom you have brought out... with great power and with a mighty hand”; Exod. 9:16 — “that my name may be proclaimed”	Daniel appeals to the Exodus as the precedent for another act of redemption

Daniel 9	Mosaic parallel	Correlation
Dan. 9:16–19 — “let your anger and your wrath turn away... hear... forgive... act”	Deut. 30:1–5 — after the curse, Israel will “return to the LORD,” and God will “restore your fortunes,” “have mercy,” gather them, and bring them back to the land	Daniel asks God to perform the post-exilic restoration Moses himself had promised
Dan. 9:18–19 — Daniel appeals not to Israel’s righteousness but to God’s “great mercy”	Deut. 4:31 — “the LORD your God is a merciful God... he will not forget the covenant with your fathers”	Israel’s hope after covenant failure rests ultimately on God’s mercy and covenant faithfulness

- Having been inspired by Scripture (Jeremiah) to pray, he now prays the Scripture itself back to God. Daniel is not just wise because he was born that way. He embodies the wisdom of Psalm 119:98-100: *“Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.”*
- Back to the original question—Does Dan. 9:4 teach that God is only faithful to the faithful? How do the references to Torah enlighten us?
 - The Mosaic covenant referred to so frequently in Daniel’s prayer provides the backdrop for understanding this question.
 - This covenant is laid out in the form of ancient Suzerain-vassal treaties. A suzerain was a great king who ruled over lesser kings or peoples; the vassal owed him exclusive loyalty, tribute, and obedience, while the suzerain pledged protection and other benefits. If the vassal rebelled, the steady flow of benefits would be replaced by consequences.
 - Under Moses, God was Israel’s suzerain. They shared a covenant, which we know as the Mosaic covenant. God promised benefits, but Israel pledged fidelity. When Daniel 9:4 says God keeps his covenant with “those who love him and obey his commandments,” it reflects this arrangement.
 - Israel had broken its side of the covenant, and now the blessings have been replaced with the ultimate consequence of exile.
 - That said, it would be wrong to suggest that God stopped being faithful the moment Israel sinned. The law itself contained provisions for forgiveness, assuming Israel would break the covenant repeatedly. Furthermore, the law of Moses was rooted in Abraham’s unconditional blessing (Ex. 2:24; 6:5). And now, even in exile, God continues to bless Israel.
 - In addition, the exile proved God’s covenant faithfulness, because he had promised judgment for covenant rebellion. Yet even that judgment was not his final word; the covenant itself anticipated repentance and restoration.
- Putting it all together: God was faithful to his covenant, which promised blessing to the faithful and curses to the rebellious. Even in their rebellion, however, God did not abandon Israel. His faithfulness included not just judgment but restoration.
- As believers under the new covenant, Christ fulfilled the entire Old Testament, including every covenant, through his life, death, and resurrection. He bore the covenant curses so that we might receive God’s covenant blessings by faith. The idea of “covenant loyalty” has not disappeared, however. God gives us a new heart and the Holy Spirit by which we can remain loyal (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:26–27). And even when we are faithless, he remains faithful.

—“we have sinned... done wrong... acted wickedly... rebelled... turning aside... not listened to your servants the prophets”:

- Daniel doesn’t mince words; he multiplies them. Every form of evil, Israel has committed. Rather than deflecting blame for the rebellion, he owns it.
- The law had already been clear; the prophets ensured nobody could pretend otherwise. They were not just “predictors of the future” but covenant lawyers. They brought the covenant to bear on Israel, warning them to repent.
- True confession never minimizes. It says “lie,” not “white lie”—as if our lie was innocent. It says “adultery,” not “affair”—as if severing our marital covenant was uneventful. It says, “I’m sorry for what I did”—not “I’m sorry if that hurt you.”
- The book of Daniel makes the prophet appear almost faultless. In fact, Ezekiel will comment on his exemplary righteousness and godly wisdom (Ezek. 14:14, 20; 28:3). However, Daniel confesses that “we have sinned.” Rather than standing over Israel as a finger-pointing prophet, he sees God pointing the finger at the whole nation, including himself. There is such a thing as “representative confession.”

Daniel confesses Israel's sin representatively, identifying himself with the whole nation. We observe similar in Nehemiah 9 and Ezra 9.

—"to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land":

- The prophets did not just warn farmers who lived in faraway lands. They marched straight into the halls of power and confronted Israel's rulers.
- We see this pattern elsewhere. Prophets often begin with kings, princes, and priests, before widening the indictment to the whole nation.
- This is because covenant rebellion is often tied to the leaders. A cursory read of Chronicles and Kings shows that when the king committed evil, so did the nation. And vice versa. The character of our leaders matters.

7 To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. 8 To us, O LORD, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. 9 To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him 10 and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

—"To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness... To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness":

- To God belongs "righteousness... mercy and forgiveness" (vv. 7, 9).
- God's righteousness shines against the backdrop of Israel's sin, and it is demonstrated in his fidelity to the covenant in vv. 11-14.
- Daniel appeals to God's mercy and forgiveness by asking him to turn away his wrath and bless his people again (vv. 16-19).

—"to the men of Judah... and to all Israel... in all the lands to which you have driven them": The northern tribes of Israel had already been exiled under Assyria, more than a century before. Daniel prays not only for his own tribe but for all the tribes of Israel.

—"but to us open shame... To us, O LORD, belongs open shame": In times past, Israel appeared to get away with sin, maintaining a nation and a monarchy. But now their shame is open for the world to see.

11 All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him. 12 He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity. For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem.

—"All Israel has transgressed": Again, his focus is not just on Judah's exile in Babylon and subsequently Medo-Persia. Daniel knows that the covenant of Moses was for all Israel, not just his own tribe.

—"curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses... He has confirmed his words... by bringing upon us a great calamity":

- God's faithfulness did not bless Israel with "shalom" apart from faith and repentance. In the absence of these, faithfulness to the covenant required him to discipline Israel with exile.
- Daniel does not shy away from God's authorship of their calamity. He knows God did not just come in on the backside, turning man's evil into ultimate good. Rather, God promised calamity on the frontside and confirmed his word by delivering it.
- This agrees with the book's introduction, where "the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah" over to Nebuchadnezzar (1:2).

—"there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem":

- We are reminded of 12:1, where "there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time."
- If Dan. 9:12 looks backward to Jerusalem's desolation under Babylon, 12:1 looks ahead to a future desolation—first, by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the second century BC (ch. 11); ultimately, just before the final resurrection (12:2).
- Jesus applies this same superlative language to speak of Jerusalem's desolation in AD 70 (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21).
- It would seem, then, that the pattern of desolating judgments through antichristian rulers / governments will roll like waves until a final tsunami before the very end.
- Scripture often uses superlative language to highlight an extreme or unique person or situation. But we should not confuse this form of speech with mathematical absolutes. Consider these examples:
 - Ex. 10:14: the locust plague: "never before had there been so many locusts, nor will there ever be again."

- Ex. 11:6: the cry over Egypt's firstborn: "such as never has been and never will be again."
- 2 Kgs. 18:5: Hezekiah: "there was none like him among all the kings of Judah... before or after."
- 2 Kgs. 23:25: Josiah: likewise, "there was no king like him before or after."
- Dan. 9:12 / 12:1 / Gospels: quoted above already.
- Joel 2:2: the invading army/day of the Lord: "their like has never been before, nor will be again."

13 As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not entreated the favor of the LORD our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth. 14 Therefore the LORD has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in all the works that he has done, and we have not obeyed his voice.

—"yet we have not entreated the favor of the LORD": The judgment of desolation was designed to discipline Israel, resulting in ultimate restoration. Daniel confesses that Israel had not humbled herself but rather suffered in vain.

—"turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth": Throughout Daniel, we have observed the consistent theme of wisdom, understanding, and insight. Daniel and his friends have displayed it, as will "the wise" at the end of the age. Here, Daniel tells us where to find it: in turning from our sins, and aligning ourselves with truth, we will gain insight. Biblical "wisdom" is not just knowing how to manage money or make plans or care for your family. It is not less than these things, but it is much more. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. Such holy fear demands a continual turning from sin and toward the LORD. The outcome of this is godly wisdom.

15 And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly. 16 "O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill, because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us.

—"who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand": Daniel has already referenced the law of Moses throughout his prayer of confession. Before Israel received the law, however, God rescued her from slavery. In reminding God of the Exodus, Daniel calls on him to repeat it. Israel is stuck, once again, in a foreign land. She needs another Exodus.

—"according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away":

- God's righteousness is not only displayed in judgment; it is also displayed in mercy.
- In other words, mercy is not God "relaxing his righteousness." Mercy displays God's righteousness! How? Because the same God who promised to judge rebellion also promised restoration afterward. Righteousness speaks of God's consistency. He always acts in accordance with his character and his covenant.
- "righteous acts" probably also speaks of the Exodus mentioned in verse 15. Daniel saw the Exodus not only as salvation for Israel but as God's righteousness on display. In saving Israel, he fulfilled the promises made to the patriarchs. Now, Daniel says, "Do it again!"

—"from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill": Daniel's heart is not only for Israel to return from exile. He wants Jerusalem and the temple restored.

17 Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. 18 O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. 19 O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name."

—"listen... make your face shine... incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations... O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not":

- After confession, Daniel lays out his requests. His first goal is to get right with God. From there, he wants to see God move on his and Israel's behalf.
- Harboring sin can lead to unanswered prayers. Zech. 7:13: "As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear."
- We can categorize Daniel's petitions like this:
 - "God, hear us!" (listen... incline your ear... pay attention")
 - "God, see us!" ("Open your eyes and see our desolations")
 - "God, show favor!" ("make your face shine... forgive")
 - "God, act now!" ("pay attention and act. Delay not.")
- "make your face shine":

- This recalls the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:24-26: *"The LORD bless you and keep you; **the LORD make his face to shine upon you** and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."*
- The Aaronic blessing was spoken by priests over the people. At the moment of Daniel's prayer, the priesthood is displaced and the temple is destroyed. Therefore, his inclusion of this phrase is poignant. He asks God to make his face shine on the ruined temple and desolated city and scattered people once again.

—"for your own sake... see our desolations... city that is called by your name... [not] because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy... for your own sake... because your city and your people are called by your name":

- We can categorize Daniel's appeal like this—"God, save us for the sake of..."
 - "...your glory!" ("for your own sake... city/people called by your name")
 - "your compassion!" ("see our desolations... because of your great mercy")
- Daniel explicitly prays that God NOT save them on account of their righteousness. God's blessing is grounded in his goodness, not ours.

—Daniel's prayer is grounded in Solomon's prayer four centuries prior. Solomon reigned over a united Israel, before it divided into northern and southern tribes. Daniel's prayer likewise addresses the sins of all Israel, not just the more recently exiled southern tribes. Solomon's prayer foresaw Israel's exile. Daniel, the student of Scripture, prays in accordance with it. Observe the correlations:

Daniel 9	1 Kings 8	Correlation
9:5 — "we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled"	8:47 — "We have sinned and have acted perversely and wickedly"	Strong verbal parallel in confession
9:7 — "in all the lands to which you have driven them"	8:46–48 — Israel carried captive "to the land of the enemy"	Exile/scattering as covenant judgment
9:15 — "you brought your people out of the land of Egypt"	8:51, 53 — "your people... whom you brought out of Egypt"	Both ground hope in the Exodus
9:16 — "your city Jerusalem... your holy hill"	8:48 — "the city that you have chosen"	Appeal for God's chosen city
9:17 — "make your face shine upon your sanctuary"	8:48 — "the house that I have built for your name"	Concern for the temple/sanctuary
9:17–19 — "hear... forgive... pay attention and act"	8:49–50 — "hear... maintain their cause... forgive"	Shared plea for God to hear and forgive exiles
9:18 — "our desolations, and the city that is called by your name"	8:44, 48 — prayer toward "the city... and the house... for your name"	Jerusalem/temple bound up with God's name
9:19 — "for your own sake... because your city and your people are called by your name"	8:43 — "that all the peoples of the earth may know your name"	God's name and reputation are central

—Daniel is not accidentally echoing Solomon's prayer. The sheer number of allusions reveals intentionality. What is the significance of this? It is this: Daniel recognizes his own generation as the one standing inside of God's promise to restore the exiles.

—Israel's exile occurred because they heeded neither the covenant nor the prophets who brought the words of the covenant to bear in their situation. Israel's return from exile will therefore begin by heeding the words of a prophet—Jeremiah—and the words of the covenant Jeremiah preached about.

—Daniel grounded his prayer in Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, 1 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and Jeremiah. Our words to God must be shaped by God's word to us.