

The Promise of Restoration

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Preacher: Andrew Price

- [0 : 00] My gracious God, we do thank you for your word, the Bible, and we thank you that you continue to speak to us through it. And so we do pray, Father, that as we look at this chapter today, that you would encourage us and remind us of what you've done for us through the Lord Jesus.
- We pray it in his name. Amen. 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 because their leader was away at the moment.
- And I said, I gave the example, for example, has your husband promised to fix something and you're still waiting? They all looked at each other and groaned. I won't say who was there.
- One said you get your hopes up and then you wait and you wait and you wait. Another one said, oh, they do fix it, but then they only do half the job. Which reminded me of one husband who promised to fix the couch and then came up with the solution on the next slide.
- He just got a dining chair, put it in there. Now, I know the women amongst us are kind of shaking their heads on the inside, but the guys are thinking, well, it works. It's all right. We all had a bit of a laugh at the Bible study group and me especially because my wife wasn't there, so I was safe.
- [1 : 11] But the point is the difficulties with promises. One of the difficulties with promises is waiting for them to be fulfilled. And it can be the same with some of God's promises. So take, for example, his promise to send Jesus back and to put the world right, to issue the new creation.
- Whether we know more fighting and so on. I mean, I've been thinking about this more and more recently given our world climate. I assume you've heard about North Korea's second missile launch last week and then the bombing in the UK.
- Thankfully, no one was killed and everything that's happening here in Australia and the freedom of speech that seems to be changed and so on. And so with all this happening, it's made me think more and more about God's promise to send Jesus back and to put our world right.
- Where it will be even better than we can imagine. But when will that happen? You see, one of the difficulties with promises is waiting for them to be fulfilled. Perhaps it's a different promise for you. Perhaps it's God's promise to provide for your needs and you're thinking, I need this, but I'm still waiting for it.
- Well, as we return to Daniel today, we come to one particular promise of God that Daniel had been waiting for. And it was a promise to bring Israel home from exile. They're in Babylon, remember?
- [2 : 23] They're in exile in Babylon. And to restore them as God's people back in Jerusalem. So at point one in your outline and verse one in your Bibles. In the first year of Darius, son of Xerxes, a Mede by descent, though he's a Persian king, 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.

And now here we learn two things. First, we learn that there's a new king in town. King Darius, who's also the same guy as Cyrus. He's just had two names.

It's the first year of his reign, which means Babylon has been defeated. King Darius is also the same guy who was duped and put Daniel on the lion's den back in chapter six.

We're not sure when this happens, whether it's before the lion's den or afterwards. But either way, it's his first year. So it means Babylon has just been conquered. That's the first thing. The second thing that's worth noticing is that Daniel was reading the Old Testament scriptures and in particular, the book of Jeremiah.

[3 : 37] Now, the book of Jeremiah had been around for at least 40 years by this stage. And so no doubt Daniel had read it before. But with the downfall of Babylon, what Jeremiah had said was now even more relevant.

For God had said through Jeremiah that after roughly 70 years, he would overthrow Babylon and restore Israel. So have a look on the next slide at some verses that Daniel was probably reading.

So in Jeremiah chapter 25, God says, you look this up in the Bible as well. This whole country Israel, so this is before they went to exile, this whole country Israel will become a desolate wasteland.

And these nations around will serve the king of Babylon for 70 years. But when the 70 years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt, declares the Lord.

Or a little later on in chapter 29 on the next slide. But God also says, when 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place of Israel.

[4 : 45] 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 what has happened here in chapter 9, verses 1 and 2? Well, Darius, the Persian king, is now ruling.

And so Babylon has been defeated. And what's more, Daniel has been in exile himself for about 66 years. And so it seems like the promise he had been waiting for is about to be fulfilled.

And yet, despite this, Daniel doesn't pack his bags with excitement, you know, rub his hands together or even pray, oh, how much longer, God, or hurry up, God. Instead, he prays, we have sinned.

Please forgive. Point two, verse three. So I turned 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.

[5 : 46] We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled. We have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants, the prophets who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors and to all the people of the land.

See, Daniel responds to God's promise by saying we have sinned. And that's why he dresses in sackcloth and ash, because it was the clothing of repentance and confession. And did you notice how he speaks of sin in terms of breaking a relationship?

So in verse four, he speaks about a covenant of love that God had with his people. There was a relationship, you see, but it was being broken by them turning away from God and ignoring his word.

You see, sin is seen as breaking a personal relationship between God and his people. Or again, in verse four, the start of verse four, if you see there the word Lord, you see how it's in capital letters? It means it's God's personal name, Yahweh.

So whenever you see in the Bible, the word Lord in capital letters, it's God's personal name, Yahweh being used. Now, his personal name is used seven times in the book of Daniel.

[6 : 56] And all seven of them are in this chapter. You see, this promise to restore Israel and bring them home from exile is much more than just restoring a nation.

It's about restoring a relationship, reconciling a relationship that was broken by sin. You see, sin is not like just ignoring the speed signs and sinning against some faceless state law, which is still not good, by the way.

But it's more like or more akin to cheating on a spouse who loves you, which is even worse. And I wonder if this is how we see sin, you know, do we realize that when we sin, it's personal for God.

It's breaking a 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's right that Daniel firstly confesses Israel's sin, which broke it.

And he continues to do this, including acknowledging that God was right to judge them. You see verse seven? Lord, you are right or righteous, but this day we are covered with shame.

[8 : 07] The people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.

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

And it is right that they are covered in shame because, verse seven, they've been unfaithful in their relationship. Or verse eight, because we have sinned, he says. And so the only way God can keep his promise to restore the nation is to firstly forgive the nation, forgive them.

Daniel alludes to this in verse nine. He says, Lord, the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him. And 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 laws and turned away, refusing to obey. Now, Daniel, we'll come back to God's mercy and forgiveness in a moment.

[9 : 14] But I don't know if you notice that throughout this prayer of confession, Daniel actually prays, we have sinned. We have not obeyed when Daniel seems to have obeyed.

I mean, throughout the book of Daniel, he seems like a good guy, doesn't he? He seems to be faithful to God. It's as though Daniel stands as Israel's representative and confesses their sins on their behalf.

In fact, it's as though Daniel takes on their sins, even though he is innocent of most of them. And I wonder if that reminds you of anyone. Stands as our representative, takes on our sins.

And it seems like Daniel has to do this because at the end of verse 13 there, we read amazingly that Israel as a nation has not repented. So Daniel, verse 13, Daniel talks about how the judgment was already promised back in the law of Moses.

So books like Deuteronomy talked about judgment coming if they disobeyed God. And then halfway through verse 13, he says, So it seems like Daniel needs to because Israel as a nation has not done so.

- [10 : 28] But Daniel not only confesses sins on their behalf, he also asks for forgiveness on their behalf. So come with me to verse 15, where he moves from confession, or mostly confession, to now mostly asking for forgiveness.

So verse 15, Now, O 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.

We do not make 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. See, Daniel prays that God might forgive Israel and restore the city of Jerusalem.

- [11 : 50] Just as he saved Israel from Egypt, verse 15, with righteous acts and made them his people. So he says, do it again. Bring us not from Egypt, but from Babylon and make us your people again.

And not because they deserve it. Did you notice the last bit of verse 18? He says, not because we are righteous, because we've done good works, but because of your mercy.

In other words, Daniel doesn't appeal to any goodness on their behalf, but only God's grace and mercy. And it's the same for us today, is it not? But when it comes to forgiveness and being restored or reconciled with God, it does not depend on how many good things we do, because we can never do enough to be perfect.

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 not actually the people. It's actually for God's name.

Yes, he is concerned in verse 16 that the people and Jerusalem have become the object of scorn and ridicule. You know, people would laugh at those Jews and tell jokes about Jerusalem.

- [12 : 58] You know, it's the suburb that no one wanted to live in, even though the property prices were cheap. It was the scorn of the ancient world. But Daniel is even more concerned that this reflects badly on God's name.

Did you notice? You see, Israel and Jerusalem both bear God's name. Several times we're told that. And so what happens to them reflects on God.

It's kind of like the same with kids and parents. And one of the reasons parents get so embarrassed when their kids misbehave is because there's a connection. The kids bear their name. And it's why when kids muck up, one parent will often say to the other, they get that from your side of the family.

So that the behavior doesn't reflect badly on them. And here, what happens to Israel and Jerusalem reflects badly on God because they bear his name.

And so if they are in exile and the city is in ruins, then either God was not powerful enough to save them, or God does not love them enough to care, or he wasn't worth enough to follow.

- [14 : 04] And so they've followed other gods and been judged. Either way you cut it, God's name in the end is mocked or brought down. And so Daniel prays that the people might be forgiven and Jerusalem might be restored, not just for the sake of the people, but verse 19 or verse 17, for your sake, Lord, look with favor.

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

Why doesn't he pack his bags with excitement? Why does he instead spend so much time confessing and begging for forgiveness? Well, again, because he knows sin is the real problem.

Sin is what broke the relationship and landed them in exile. So sin is what needs to be wiped clean to restore the relationship and keep this particular promise. Oh, sure, God could just, you know, bring them back to the land and the people could just rebuild the city.

But without a restored relationship, it wouldn't be God's city. The people wouldn't be God's people. There'd be no relationship. And so Daniel knows for God to truly keep this particular promise, sin must be wiped clean.

[15 : 24] And so that's why he prays for forgiveness. And he gets an answer to his prayer. Point three, verse 20. He says, while I was speaking and praying, confessing my sins and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my God for his holy hill, while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision last week in chapter 8, came to me in swift flight about this 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 has another vision, as we've seen over the last couple of weeks. And this vision, he sees this man Gabriel again, who has a word or an answer for him.

In fact, did you notice in verse 23, that this answer to Daniel's prayer went out from God, presumably, as soon as Daniel started praying.

Did you see that? It's as though God couldn't even wait for Daniel to finish praying before he gave an answer. When I pray, it feels like my prayers sometimes go via snail mail or get lost in the post, because God seems to take so long to answer them.

[16 : 51] And yet the picture we're given here is one where God can't wait to answer our prayers. Of course, the answer can be no or not yet or yes, but not how you think.

And so it might feel like God takes ages to answer when he already has, in fact. But for Daniel, Gabriel is sent so that Daniel knows for sure his prayer has been answered, and more than that, so that Daniel can know what that answer is.

He can have understanding, it says. So what is this answer or understanding? Well, it starts in verse 24. He says, Now, before we flick over, we'll focus on verse 24 just for a moment.

Here, Daniel is told that God will actually do even more than he asked for. You see, Daniel asked for God to forgive Israel and restore the city of Jerusalem. And God will do that.

It's the first phrase there. Do you see that? To finish transgression for your people and your holy city. So yeah, God was going to do that. I'll forgive Israel. I'll restore Jerusalem from exile. The problem, though, is that Israel will sin again, just like we do.

[18 : 18] And it will break the covenant again. And so God says, I'm going to do even more than just restore them. I'm going to put an end to the sin that put them there in the first place. You see the next three phrases in verse 24?

He says, I'm going to 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 on tap, such that I'll never have to judge them again.

I can just keep forgiving them. But when will this end to sin happen? When will this vision be sealed up or fulfilled?

To seal up the vision means to kind of stamp it as though it's done. So when you go to the post office with your gas bill or electricity bill, you know how you pay it, and then they stamp it with a paid stamp as though it's done, it's fulfilled. That's what it means to seal up the vision.

It means to fulfill it, stamp it as though paid and done. When is all this going to happen? Well, the start of verse 24 says, 77s.

[19 : 23] You see, the 70 years of Jeremiah where God will restore Israel point to a 77s where God will do even more. He'll restore in a greater way. And we need to remember in this sort of writing that numbers are more symbolic than literal.

The number seven often means perfect. I know in your footnote, some translation has weeks, but no one can agree on whether it's weeks or years or something else. So I think we're on safer ground to take it symbolically as we're meant to with this sort of writing.

And the number seven often means perfect. So 77s refers to a perfect amount of time in which God will do all this. But there'll be a process.

There'll be steps involved. And so as the vision continues, these 77s are broken down into different steps. Now turn the page and have a look at these steps and see how the 70 is broken down.

Verse 25, and you need your thinking caps on. Know and 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.

[20 : 32] 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 temple and the end will come like a flood. War will continue until the end and desolations have been decreed.

He will confirm a covenant with many for one seven and in the middle of the one 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? Oh my goodness. One Bible scholar said of these verses that they are the hardest in the whole Old Testament to understand.

Aren't you glad you came today? Now, of course, there are some things that Daniel would have understood. I mean, verse 25, it's, you know, we understand what it means for a word to go out to rebuild the city.

[21 : 35] That's understandable. That makes sense. It would have been encouraging, in fact. Daniel would have also understood that the city would be rebuilt in times of trouble. That makes sense, even though it would have been discouraging.

Verse 26 also, he would have understood that God's anointed one, which is literally the word Messiah, Christ, will be put to death and that sacrifices would end, the temple would be destroyed again and there is no mention of it being rebuilt after that.

Daniel would have understood those things, even though he would have been alarmed by them. 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 then start adding them all together? What would happen when, you know, seven times seven is 49 plus 62, carry the one. In fact, no one understands this bit.

As I said before, they can't even agree on whether it's weeks or years or something else. I was racking my brain all week trying to work this out when I realized if we were meant to understand it, God would have made it clearer.

[22 : 39] I don't think neither Daniel nor we are supposed to work out the numbers bit. Rather, what we're meant to understand from the numbers is that God has a plan. That's why there's, it's broken down into specific bits or steps of the plan.

The numbers are not so that Daniel can add them up on his fingers and toes, rather so that he can and we can know that God is not flying by the seat of his pants and making it up as he's going along.

Rather, God has mapped it all out and he knows what will happen when. He has a plan that 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 on history, God did work it out.

Daniel only had to wait one more year because the following year a word did go out to rebuild Jerusalem. Adarius or Cyrus issued a decree for the Jews to go home and rebuild.

[23 : 44] In fact, on the next slide is a stone which is called the Cyrus Cylinder. It's in the British Museum today. And in between the ribbings, you can't see it, but it's actually small carved writing.

And that writing is the decree to send all the people back, including the Jews. Exactly what we see here. Cyrus did it rather selfishly though.

He sent everyone back to build their own temple so they could pray for him and that their gods might give him a long life. But they got home nonetheless. And we know from history that the temple and the city of Jerusalem was built in times of trouble.

So on the next slide, if you keep going, from Nehemiah, we read that Nehemiah says, Look, half my men did the work of building the walls of Jerusalem while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armour.

Why? Because it was troubling times. And then if you look in your Bibles at verse 26, the anointed one, literally the Messiah, the Christ, same meaning, was put to death and had nothing.

[24 : 43] We know who that is, don't we? Jesus Christ was crucified, cut off from the land of the living. And at the cross he had nothing. For he was stripped of his clothes, his disciples forsook him and 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 in that moment. Of course, he also rose again.

And then after this, in the rest of verse 26, we read that a people will come and a ruler will come, a different ruler, and they will destroy the temple and the city.

And we know from history, Roman history in fact, that this was the Roman general Titus. So on the next slide is a bust of him in the British Museum as well. This is Titus, who's the Roman general.

And he destroyed the city and the temple in 70 AD, just 40 years after Jesus was crucified. In fact, in Italy, on the next slide, there is an arch there today.

[25 : 44] You can go and visit it. It's called the Titus Arch, which celebrates the victory over Jerusalem. because on the next slide, if on the inside of the arch, there's this relief. It's hard to see, so on the next slide is a better picture.

And you'll see the Romans carrying away the bits from the temple. And do you notice the candelabra, the Jewish candelabra in the middle there? They're celebrating the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem.

That's what happened in history. And to this day, the temple has never been rebuilt, just like we saw in this vision. And in verse 27, it gets a bit more difficult.

I think on the next slide is a better translation of verse 27. It seems to be talking about two different people. I think in the first part, he, I think, is Jesus, the anointed one who makes a strong covenant.

The word strong is missing in our translations with people. In other words, Jesus will make a new covenant, a new relationship to replace the one that was broken by sin back in verse 4.

[26 : 45] And this one will be strong because it would not be broken by people's sin again. For now that Jesus has paid for sin once for all, there'd always be forgiveness available so that the covenant, the relationship, can always be kept and maintained.

It won't be broken, you see. And because Jesus has paid for sin, then there's no longer any need for sacrifices or offerings, and so he's ended them by his death.

And then in the last part of verse 27, I think it's a different person who comes, which again I think is the Roman general Titus who comes and whose soldiers worshipped their Roman gods in the temple courts, which was an abomination, and yet Titus will come to an end.

And in history he did. Two years after he became emperor, he died suddenly, aged 41. You see, God not only kept his promise of restoration in Jeremiah, the way Daniel was thinking, you know, bringing Israel back, forgiving them, and rebuilding the city, but he also kept his promise of this greater restoration or reconciliation in Christ, where sins would be dealt with once and for all, and all people would have an opportunity to be right with God, to have, in Daniel's words, everlasting righteousness, being right with God.

That's what we heard in our second reading. God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement. Atone for our sins, verse 24 of Daniel. And so that we can be forgiven and made right with God.

[28 : 17] And as we heard in that second reading from Romans, this promised restoration is open to all who believe in Jesus, not by our righteousness, but by God's grace and mercy.

And so the first question for us this morning is, like Daniel did for Israel, have you humbly confessed your sins to God? Asked for forgiveness, not because of your good works, but because of his mercy in Christ.

Have you put your faith in Jesus, believing that he died to pay for those sins, to make you right with God now and forever? Have you done that? Because it's the only way to have a restored relationship with God.

And for us who have, then three quick things. First, do we continue to confess and ask for forgiveness? So as we saw in Daniel's prayer, sin is serious. It's personal to God and we still do it.

Yet this promise of restoration continues to stand. God has dealt with sin once and for all in Christ, so forgiveness is always available. It's always on tap, ready to be received the moment we ask.

[29 : 25] And so do we continue to ask humbly for forgiveness like Daniel and then give thanks because it's always there for us to receive. I remember one guy who we had several meals with and every meal when he said grace, he not only thanked God for the food, but he also would say and thank you for the forgiveness of sins we have in Christ.

Amen. And it struck me, it's not something I normally add to my grace at mealtimes, but you see, he was ever thankful for the ongoing forgiveness we can have in Christ. Second, we are to pray that more people might be restored or reconciled, not just for their sake, but for God's name's sake.

Do you remember Daniel's greatest concern? It's for God's name to be honoured. Is that our greatest concern when we pray? It was Jesus' greatest concern.

I mean, can you remember what the first line of the Lord's Prayer is? Remember the first line of the Lord's Prayer? Anyone? Hallowed be your name or honoured be your name. You see, the first thing Jesus taught his disciples to pray was that God's name might be honoured.

That was his greatest concern. And how is it honoured? Well, by people becoming Christians and growing as Christians, which incidentally is why the second line of the Lord's Prayer is, your kingdom come or grow, that God's name might be honoured.

[30 : 50] And thirdly and finally, we had a trust in God's promises and his timing. He kept his promise of the 70 years in Jeremiah, yes, and he has kept the promise of the 77s in Christ.

He keeps his promises, but we don't always know when he'll keep them, do we? Daniel knew from Jeremiah, one of them, that it would be 70 years, but he didn't know what the 77s meant or how long it would be.

He just knew that God had a plan and that it would be accomplished in his perfect timing. And so, we need to trust, in fact, we can trust his promises because he's kept them, but we also need to trust in his timing, including the promise to provide for our needs, which he often leaves to the last minute.

Do you notice that? He kind of leaves to the last minute so you're forced to trust him. Or the promise to work for our good to make us like Christ or the promise to bring us home to heaven. In fact, I was talking with someone from our church recently who is suffering and being so for three years now, I think it is, such that she's ready to go home to heaven.

And they had a heart attack earlier this year and she thought she would, but she didn't. And she was asking me, he said, oh, it's really hard. I don't know why he didn't take me. Does he not want me there, Andrew? And I said, of course he does, but he sees the bigger picture.

[32 : 09] And so his promise to bring us home is in his timing. Just like the promise to send Christ back to put this crazy world right in the new creation is in his timing. So we had to trust God's promises and his timing for us.

Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for this reminder again this morning that at the heart of our relationship is the forgiveness of sins we have in Christ.

Father, we thank you that you not only brought back Israel and restored Jerusalem, but you gave a greater restoration in Christ. you dealt with sins once and for all. And so, Father, we pray that you would help us to be ever thankful for the forgiveness of sins we have, for the restored relationship we have with you.

And we pray that you would help us to keep trusting in your promises and in your timing. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.