

## Aim of lesson

To show from Daniel's example the importance and power of prayer.

## Bible background

Daniel 6 and 9.

## Outline of lesson

### The plot and the plotters

Many classes will know something of the story of Daniel being thrown into the lions' den. Use the boxes in the workbook to bring out the character and thinking of the people involved.

The boxes are for the administrators who plotted against Daniel, for Daniel himself and for Darius. The boxes can be used by the class to describe the attitudes of the characters, or they can write what the characters themselves might say about what happened. The corruption and self-interest of the officials should be contrasted with the honest, hard-working attitude of Daniel. The whole of chapter 6 could be read by the class, if you haven't asked them to read the chapter during the week before the lesson and come ready with ideas about the characters.

### Continuing to pray

In the next section in the workbook the class should write what they think Daniel might say if asked why he continued to pray. This should encourage a discussion on the importance of prayer. Jesus' encouragement in Luke 18:1; Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 5:17; and James' 5:16 (quoted in the workbook) could be used. It would be helpful to ask the class about their habits of prayer. Do they pray 'when they remember to', 'if they are not too tired' or do they make time to build prayer into their lives?

### The end of seventy years

The prayer of Daniel in chapter 9 is certainly both powerful and effective. The time is approximately the same as that of chapter 6. Darius was the ruler that Cyrus, king of Persia, had placed over Babylon. It was in the first year of the reign of Cyrus that Daniel prays, only days or months after the events of the last lesson when Belshazzar was killed and Darius took over Babylon. Daniel's reason for praying is that he knew the prophecy of Jeremiah, in particular Jeremiah 29:10 (see also Jeremiah 25:11 and 2 Chronicles 36:21). Jeremiah 29 is a letter sent to the exiles in Babylon, see Jeremiah 29:1. Daniel must have read this letter and counted the days, knowing that Jeremiah had said they would return after seventy years. Jeremiah had also said that they would serve the king of Babylon for seventy years. Daniel had just witnessed the fall of Babylon; Cyrus, the king of Persia, now ruled over the whole area including Daniel's homeland. It was about seventy years since the first captives had been taken to Babylon. Daniel, therefore, sets himself to pray to God about the promised return and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Ask the class to note how seriously Daniel takes the task of praying for God's will, In Daniel 9:3 he 'pleads with prayer and petition and in sackcloth and ashes'.

### The answers

Daniel is given two answers to his prayer, though only one is recorded in this chapter.

- In the same year that he prays, Cyrus, king of Persia, gives a proclamation allowing the Jews to return to their land and build the Temple in Jerusalem; Ezra 1:1-5.
- The angel Gabriel was sent while Daniel was still praying to give a detailed answer to his prayer. The answer speaks of a length of time of seventy weeks which will see the end of the transgression and sin, and the anointing of the Most Holy. It is possible that it was 70 weeks later (about 11½ years) when the returning Jews again set up an altar in Jerusalem. However, the details of the prophecy were not adequately fulfilled at that time. The prophecy speaks of the Anointed One or Messiah, the prince. It speaks of him being cut off or killed, things which did not happen at the time of which Ezra writes. The 70 weeks prophecy brings us exactly to the time of Christ.

### The outworking

For students who want to look at the detailed outworking of this prophecy, the following is included. The 70 weeks, as with other Bible prophecies, is understood by taking a day in the prophecy to represent a year (cf. Ezekiel 4:4-6). The length of time is therefore  $70 \times 7 = 490$  years.

The prophecy says that the time begins with the command to restore and build Jerusalem. This is not the decree of Cyrus as that was about restoring the Temple, not the city.

About sixty years after the Temple was built, Artaxerxes gives another decree allowing the Jews to return and build. It is at this time that the building of Jerusalem gets underway, see Ezra 4:11 – 12. The 'decree', see Ezra 7:11-13, is dated in verses 7 and 8, as the seventh year of Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes reigned from 464 to 423 B.C., and his seventh year was therefore 457 B.C.

The prophecy in Daniel speaks of 7 weeks and 62 weeks i.e. 69 weeks to the time when the Messiah will come, Daniel 9:25. In verse 27 (AV) it says that he will confirm the covenant for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put an end to sacrifice. Verse 26 says he will be cut off i.e. he will be killed, but not for himself. 69 weeks is 483 days. 483 years after 457 B.C. is the year 27 AD. This is generally thought to be the time when Jesus began his ministry. He would be 'about 30 years of age' in 27 AD if he was born in 4 B.C., before Herod the Great died.

The middle of the week would be 3½ years later when the Lord Jesus was crucified.

### The workbook

It is not essential for the class to follow the detailed outworking of this prophecy. It is included for those who are interested. The class only needs to include the return under the decree of Cyrus as one answer and the fact that Daniel is given a prophecy of the coming and death of the Messiah as the other. However, Daniel's dedication to understand the prophecy of Jeremiah and to pray about its fulfilment was rewarded. The class should consider if they have the same sort of interest and dedication to understand the prophecy of Daniel.

## **Digging deeper**

### **Gabriel and other angels**

The work of angels is covered in this section.

### **Relevance to our lives**

The class could discuss how they can put into practice this week the lesson they have learned about prayer, from Daniel.

### **Prayer**

The class could imagine they were Daniel after saying the prayer of Daniel 9 and then hearing of the decree of Cyrus. What prayer might Daniel have said then?

Alternatively, they could make a plan of times when they could pray during the day and consider what they might say at different times.

### **Other suggestions for activities**

- The class could make a tape recording 'Radio News Report' of the events of Daniel 6 about the plot against Daniel and its results.
- The class could write an imaginary letter from Daniel to Ezekiel telling him about the wonderful answers to his prayer.
- The class may like to look at the prophecies of Isaiah 13 and 14 to consider the relationship between the present state of Babylon and Daniel's prophecy about the future.