

THE LORD'S PRAY-ER

DANIEL 9:1-19 MARCH 6, 2019

Daniel chapter 9 is where we find ourselves this evening. When I think of finding gold, the image that comes to mind is an old prospector, with his little pan down by a river, sifting through mud. In reality, the vast majority of gold is *mined*, deep within the earth. Gold usually exists in very small particles.¹ The mining process gets lots of rock blown up, then smashed into dust, turned into a slurry and then chemically treated to suck the gold out. Sometimes in those mines they find great veins of gold, formed as a deposit. Those veins of ore might be a couple of yards wide, or they might be like one they found in Burma back in 2012. It's 10 miles wide at some points and almost 120 miles long.²

Daniel 9 is a vein of gold like that. In the treasure chest of God's Word, it's one of the crown jewels among the riches. This chapter contains what is known as the 70 Weeks Vision. It's immensely important. Scholars call it the "backbone" to Bible prophecy. Dr. John Walvoord calls it the "key passage" to understanding Bible prophecy. Dr. Charles Feinberg wrote that it was "one of the most important chapters in the entire Bible." Arno Gaebelein said the prophetic message in this chapter "is perhaps the most important not only in the Book of Daniel, but in the whole Bible."³

But not only is Daniel 9 significant because of the *prophecy* it contains, but it is also home to one of the most remarkable *prayers* in all the Scriptures. In fact, *twice* as much space is dedicated to Daniel's prayer as is given to the vision of the 70 weeks. It shines like pure and polished gold.

Tonight we'll take a look at that prayer, but I want us to resist the urge to look at it as a *formula* for our own prayer lives. It's gold we've found here, not iron. If you read commentaries on these verses, the majority of them will call it a "model" prayer, breaking it down methodically. They'll use this as an example of "how to be persuasive in prayer." There are a couple of problems with that approach to a passage like this. First of all, the point of prayer is that it be *genuine* and *personal*. No one you know as a friend or a loved one wants you to communicate with them mechanically. They don't want you to *mimic* the way *someone else* talks to them. That would be very strange, even offensive.

But, on another level, it's almost comical to come to this inspirational prayer of Daniel, a man who had lived a faithful, fruitful, powerful life serving God for 80 years by this point, and then say, "Ok, I'll just copy that for myself and have a great prayer life." That's not how it works. Earlier today I saw a video that had been uploaded by John Mayer, the pop singer. He's known for his guitar solos. He's a masterful guitar player. The video was 7 minutes of him, in the studio, working through the solo of the new song he recently released. He's finding his way to what will be the impressive finished product. Now, we all know that someone could try to *copy* that video - use the kind of guitar he used, stand the way he was standing, mimic the notes he played - but that doesn't make their playing as amazing as John Mayer's. Because his playing, in that video, is the culmination of decades of growth and determination and dedication.

So, we shouldn't bring Daniel's prayer into a lab and try to reverse engineer it. "Ok, let's copy the steps he took and then our prayer life will be powerful and persuasive." Rather, we should focus on this Godly man, learn from his character and, more importantly, focus on the *God* he talks about in

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMOYOB3NCYY>

² <http://hlao01980.blogspot.com/2012/02/biggest-vein-of-gold-in-world.html>

³ A. C. Gaebelein, The Prophet Daniel

this prayer, not the schematic of his sentences. Look at the man, rather than the method. The *object* of Daniel's worship rather than the *arrangement* of his words.

Daniel 9:1-2 - In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—² in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years *specified* by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

Daniel had been in Babylon for about 67 years at this point. The quick takeaways that are frequently pointed out are that, number one: though Daniel was a prophet, he was still a *student* of prophecy and a student of God's word. He had spent his whole life looking into the Scriptures, but even here as an old man he was still finding new veins of gold in that inexhaustible mine. And number two: Daniel interpreted prophecy *literally*. He believed 70 years meant 70 years. It wasn't an allegory. It wasn't spiritualized. Daniel was doing the math and realized they were at the tail end of this thing. He would have, no doubt, also had a copy of Isaiah, written long before, which had pointed at Cyrus by name. And now, there was a Cyrus on the world scene. God was moving just as He said He would.

Daniel 1:3 - ³ Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

I find it interesting that, in all the commentaries that talk about how we should pattern our prayers in the manner of Daniel's prayer here, none of them say, "But first, drive down to Michael's and get yourself some burlap to wear. Start a wood fire to make some ashes and pour them over your head." They say, "Ok, he started with saying *this* about God, then moved to confession, then went to his requests." But, they skip over this first part. Instead they'll just point out that Daniel "prepared" for prayer. Ok. But if we're supposed to copy Daniel's method, then copy his *whole* method.

In the Bible we see *many* "effective" prayers. Some were planned. Others were spontaneous. Some are long and complex. And one of the greatest in all the Word is, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Prayer isn't supposed to be mechanical. It's supposed to be personal.

Rather than mimic the mechanics of Daniel's prayer, we note simply that, as he did when he was a youth back in chapters 1 and 2, Daniel *believed* in the power of prayer. He, clearly, believed it was a crucial part of every day life and it was something he practiced in a variety of intensities.

Daniel 1:4-6 - ⁴ And I prayed to the Lord my God, and made confession, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, ⁵ we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments. ⁶ Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land.

John Phillips and Jerry Vines write, "[Daniel] scoured the Hebrew language for words to describe how wickedly the Jews had behaved."⁴ We note that Daniel included himself in the mix. It's always "we" and "us." He does not try to excuse himself or separate himself from the crowd of sinners. We think of Daniel and are quick to say, "He's one the only figures in the Old Testament who has no sins

⁴ John Phillips, Jerry Vines, Exploring The Book Of Daniel

attributed to him.” And yet, like Paul, Daniel was *acutely* aware of his sin before God. He knew there is none righteous, no not one. You only had to look at God for an *instant* to realize the bankruptcy of even the most religious, upright man. And Daniel would have us look on God in this prayer.

Here, we’re reminded of God’s greatness. His awesomeness. His fidelity and powerful grace. But, most of all, we see God’s *mercy* highlighted. Though His people had refused to do good and had, in fact, done evil, still God reached out to them. He showed His power through many infallible signs. He sent His word as a special revelation and as a prescription for their lives. He sent servants and prophets, messenger after messenger to try to coax His people back from the brink of sin. God reached out to the highest levels of their government, to the general population and individual families. And yet, again and again, they walked away from God’s plan and His commands. They rebelled. Sometimes *violently*, killing His servants.

Think about God’s love for rebels. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. We were far from God, hostile in our minds toward Him, proliferating in evil. Yet, all the while, God was drawing toward us, trying to show us His love and show us that, while we’re busy in rebellion, He’s trying to set us free so He can get us *into* His royal family, that we might rule and reign with Him.

Daniel 9:7-8 - ⁷ O Lord, righteousness *belongs* to You, but to us shame of face, as *it is* this day –to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You. ⁸ “O Lord, to us *belongs* shame of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You.

Their sin hadn’t done them any favors. It’s like those stupid, “all I got was this lousy t-shirt” shirts. Israel’s national motto could’ve been, “I went to the world, and all I got was this lousy captivity.” Sin is always a destroyer, always a deceiver. Look what it did to Israel. Look what it does all around us.

There is no failure on God’s part at all. He is *full* of love and compassion. He is *full* of righteousness. Mankind, on the other hand, so often chooses darkness rather than light. I appreciate how Daniel *owned* this stuff. He said, “this shame of face *belongs* to us.” By no means is he being too hard on himself or his countrymen. This is simply the reality of the human heart. Which makes us realize just how magnificent God’s long-suffering mercy is.

I also find it interesting that, in this prayer, which was prompted by reading about the promises of God, Daniel doesn’t spend time “declaring” things for himself or “claiming” promises. He spends time confessing and honoring God. I’m not saying that’s the pattern we always need to follow. But, right now, it’s in fashion the wider Christian community to emphasize claiming promises and declaring things in prayer. Perhaps there’s a time and a place for that, but it wasn’t part of Daniel’s prayer here, when he’s *specifically* praying about how God was going to accomplish His promises.

Daniel 9:9-12 - ⁹ To the Lord our God *belong* mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him. ¹⁰ We have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets. ¹¹ Yes, all Israel has transgressed Your law, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice; therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him. ¹² And He has confirmed His words, which He spoke against us and against our judges who judged us, by bringing upon us a great disaster; for under the whole heaven such has never been done as what has been done to Jerusalem.

The repetition here brings out the genuine, personal character of the prayer. He certainly wasn't praying some formula. He's pouring out his heart on behalf of his people, feeling the weight of his *own* sin, and glorying in the multiplied mercies of God.

Here Daniel points out that what had happened to Israel should have come as no surprise. It was the covenant they had agreed to, way back with Moses in the wilderness. They had signed on the dotted line. God had been very explicit, very clear about what would happen if they broke the covenant. And then, God waited hundreds of years for them to repent. When they wouldn't, the Lord kept up His end of the bargain. We can be sure that God will keep His word.

Our spiritual decisions have real-world consequences for us and for those around us. And our real-world decisions always have a spiritual component. That's why God has given us precepts and judgements, so that we can know the way we should go and how we can walk in obedience.

Daniel 9:13-15 - ¹³“As *it is* written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth. ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord has kept the disaster in mind, and brought it upon us; for the Lord our God *is* righteous in all the works which He does, though 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 made Yourself a name, as *it is* this day—we have sinned, we have done wickedly!

As Daniel surveyed the spiritual condition of God's people there in Babylon, it didn't seem like things had improved much. Apparently, no one had been organizing prayer vigils or revival meetings. Back in the beginning of the book we saw that, out of *all* the captives from Judah in the palace, only 4 were interested in going God's way.

We may hope for national revival, we certainly need it. But, even if the people around us *aren't* setting their face toward the Lord, *we* can. *We* can pray. *We* can live faithfully. Daniel's whole life is as testament to the fact that a person *can* honor God and be used by Him, even in the worst of circumstances. And, as we serve God, we remember that He's *still* the God who brought His people out of Egypt. Out of Babylon. He's *still* the God of the Book of Acts. He's *still* the God of the Great Awakening, the Welsh Revival, the Jesus Movement. Our part, as individuals, is to turn toward Him, believe the truth and be transformed. To be spiritually revived in our own hearts and lives.

Now Daniel gets to his request.

Daniel 9:16-17 - ¹⁶“O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people *are* a reproach to all *those* around us. ¹⁷ Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate.

His prayer is not for himself, but for God's glory. Yes, it is Daniel's hope that the nation, the city and the sanctuary be restored, and along with them the people. But his concern is first for the glory of God. “For the Lord's sake” he says.

Charles Feinberg writes, “This is the highest purpose of prayer, that God might be glorified. His glory outweighs every other conceivable argument or benefit that might appeal to mortal man, and no prayer can ever aspire to anything greater.”⁵

Not only does Daniel pray for God’s glorification, he appeals to God’s *mercy*. There is no whiff of merit, or deservingness. No, he asks God to, by His *mercy*, bring them back into that relationship of love and protection. That once again their motto might be “The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.”

Daniel 9:18-19 - ¹⁸ O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. ¹⁹ O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name.”

Daniel knows that no amount of works or penance or special prayers could merit God’s favor. But he also knows that God’s exceedingly great, abounding mercies far outweigh all of the sins of all the world. And he knows that the Lord *wants* to act on behalf of His people. He *wants* to move in mercy toward those who obey. Our friend Dennis Agajanian is fond of saying, “Jesus is a greater Savior than you are a sinner.” And that’s true. God’s merciful forgiveness is sufficient to cover all the sins of all the people of all the places in all the eras of human history. But, as Daniel said back in verse 4, God’s mercy is only activated and effective for those “who love Him and keep His commandments.” If you’re here tonight and you want God’s mercy, if you want forgiveness for the wrong things you’ve done and you want to be set free from your sin, God is ready and waiting to do it for you. But He only gives His mercy to those who love Him. How do you love Him? By believing and obeying. Jesus said in John 14:21 “Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them.”

Daniel was a man who *expected* God to move in his life, and God did. But Daniel could only have that expectation because he went God’s way. He didn’t do it perfectly. He identifies himself here, over and over, as a wicked sinner, but he knew God’s mercy was enough to transform the best man or the worst man. To change them from captive to being called by God’s name.

You and I are called by a name. Paul said in First Corinthians chapter 1 that we “have been called by God to be his own holy people.” We’re called by a name, called to a life. We’re called to listen to the Lord and walk obediently in the paths He’s carved out for us. As we go, we can marvel at the incredible mercy He’s given us, day by day. And we can continually enjoy the richness of a personal relationship with the Living God. And, as we mine for gold in our prayer lives and our Bible study, we are refined as treasure in His hands, scattered throughout the world as jewels of God’s love, His power and His mercy.

⁵ Charles Feinberg A Commentary on Daniel: The Kingdom Of The Lord