

Prayer to God in the Valley of Vision

Daniel's Response to His Distressing Visions

ESV Daniel 8: 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."

²⁰ While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God,

²¹ while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice.

²² He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding.

²³ At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision.

²⁴ "Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.

²⁵ Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.

²⁶ And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.

²⁷ And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.

(Daniel 9:1-27)

Prayer and the Christian

I was once in a Sunday School class where the teacher asked, “**How many of you pray without ceasing?**” There was an awkward silence that lasted a few seconds and, of course, no one raised their hand. To answer such a question in the affirmative would have to be the height of spiritual arrogance. Who would dare say yes to that question?

I raised my hand.

I couldn't help myself. The question comes from Paul's exhortation in **1Th 5:17**. I believe that people read this verse **far too literally**, as if Paul means you can't stop talking, ever, to God. That isn't what he means. He means that **your entire life** should be done in conscious acknowledgement that he is present with you in everything you say or do. In this respect, a Christian can't help but have their whole life be one perpetual prayer to God.

There's an apocryphal saying attributed to C.S. Lewis which actually comes from the screen writer of the movie about Lewis called *Shadowlands*. The famous part of the quotation comes at the end. "**Prayer doesn't change God, it changes me.**" The only person who really said that was Anthony Hopkins playing Lewis in the movie. It's still an intriguing idea. But the beginning is far less known. In it, he says, as I did when I answered that question, "**I pray because I can't help myself.**"

I believe that most Christians want to learn to pray better. But how? I want to answer this question in **two ways** today. One is by looking at **what would cause someone internally** to have their whole life necessarily move in a direction of prayer. The other is by looking at the kinds of things that **might go**

into our prayers. In doing this, I have to distinguish between two kinds of prayers, and I will do this in two different ways.

In an essay called “Work and Prayer,” the real Lewis distinguishes between what he calls the lowest sort of prayer which “consists asking for things to happen.” This differs from “the higher sort” which “offers no advice to God; it consists only of ‘communication’...with Him.”¹

There is another way of looking at prayer which flips these two categories around. The first is to think of prayer formally. By this I mean previously thought out, often corporate and public prayer. This is prayer that is not off-the-cuff as it were. The second is to think of prayer as informal or spontaneous. This is prayer that instantly arises out of a circumstance of life. I say this reverses the categories because I would think that if you were to categorize formal prayer as “high” or “low” you would probably think of it as high, like we do a high liturgy. But we saw that high prayer for Lewis is prayerful communication. It is a much more intimate way of praying than simply asking God for things. For him, informal and high are very similar.

¹ C. S. Lewis, “Work and Prayer,” *The Coventry Evening Telegraph* (28 May 1945). <https://redeeminggod.com/work-and-prayer-by-c-s-lewis/>.

I wanted to give you these **two ways of thinking about prayer**, which seem to me to deliberately jumble our normal categories, in order to help you see that high and low prayer are not right or wrong. Neither are formal and informal prayers. In fact, it is only in combining them together that you truly start to get at what prayer is all about.

Daniel 9—Structure and Context (Dan 9:1-2)

Daniel 9 contains one of the great prayers of the Bible and one of the longest (outside of the Psalms). Someone has called it a “**liturgical prayer**,”² because of its high literary formality and how it has been incorporated in other places in corporate settings.³ It is interesting to me that it comes **on the heels of the last verse of Daniel 8**. “**I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days. Then I rose and went about the king’s business, but I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it**” (**Dan 8:27**). The last thing Daniel has done is **go back to work**. Now he **begins to pray**. That’s Lewis’ article, “**Work and Prayer**.” We will see that it is in fact related to ch. 8, though in a roundabout way.

² **André Lacocque**, “The Liturgical Prayer in Daniel 9,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 47 (1976): 119-42. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23506899?read-now=1&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

³ **van Deventer, H. J. M. (Hans)**. “Suffering, Psalms and Allusion in Daniel 9.” *Old Testament Essays* 25/1 (2012): 207-226. <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/ote/v25n1/11.pdf>.

It begins, however, in a totally different year. “In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus” (Dan 9:1). Who is this Darius? He is “by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans.” This is the same Darius who took over Babylon the night that Belshazzar was put to death in the year 539 B.C. We saw before that the Greeks knew him as Cyaxares II. This is the king who was led by his traitorous politicians to hand perhaps his only friend, Daniel, over to the lion’s den. Because it is the first year of the reign of a brand new empire, the events of ch. 9 “are set against the backdrop of a new dawn—a time of great potential and yet great uncertainty for Babylon.”⁴ This has meaning for the passage, especially as Daniel enters into his prayer and receives his answer. As we have seen in several chapters now, the historical setting itself plays a part in illuminating the events of the coming chapter.

Unlike chs. 7-8, there is no formal vision here, at least not until the angel Gabriel returns, and that isn’t to give him a fantastical or bizarre dream, but to answer his prayer in a most unusual way. Nevertheless, the story still focuses on Daniel.

⁴ See James Bejon, “Chapter 9 :: Not Seventy Times, But Seventy Times Seven,” 15. <http://dj4real.com/28238289>.

“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” (Dan 9:2). Here we have Daniel—the chief of the magicians of Babylon (5:11)—studying not esoteric Babylonian or Persian mysticism or occult spirituality, but the Holy Scripture! This is how the man was able to stay grounded in the midst of such an unlikely and easy to compromise job.

Specifically, he is reading from the prophet Jeremiah. Now, this is interesting, because Jeremiah was a contemporary of Daniel, though like that of the lifespans of a father to a son. Jeremiah was born prior to Daniel in Israel to Hilkiyah, who was probably the High Priest at the time. He spent time in various king’s courts giving God’s word. Daniel, too, was often in the king’s court, (1:3-6) prior to his deportation, for he was royalty. Therefore Daniel certainly knew who Jeremiah was. He was around 40 when Daniel was carried off into Babylon, but Jeremiah was never deported. Instead, he spends most of his days in his homeland prophesying about their sin and future.

Around 604 B.C., Jeremiah gives the following prophecy. “I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the

voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp. 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 25:10-12). And again, “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” (Jer 29:10). It is remarkable that Jeremiah’s prophecy has made it all the way to Babylon and now Daniel is thinking about it.

Why might this be on Daniel’s mind? There are a couple of reasons. First, 604 B.C. to 539 B.C. is 65 years. Daniel is thinking that the time of its fulfillment must be near, especially because *Babylon has just fallen!* Second, it talks about *the end of the desolations of Jerusalem*. But what desolations? Daniel has seen a glorious future for Israel (7:27), but also a little horn who wreaks havoc in Jerusalem’s temple (8:11-12), because of their sin. Yet, the temple is not presently standing. So how can he process all these things? He turns to

Jeremiah for an answer. James Bejon gives us a summary of what ch. 9 will cover.

Israel's story will be very different from the nations'. While the Gentile kingdoms will end in ruins, the kingdom of Israel—long buffeted from pillar to post—will ultimately be restored, even as the Jewish people seek to understand God's divine plans. Paradoxically, however, the solution to Israel's problem is its cause, namely, God and his covenant. Just as Israel's exile was brought about by God's covenant (and Israel's disobedience to it), so Israel's restoration will also be brought about by God's covenant (and God's fulfilment of it). He who has smitten Israel will also heal her. Meanwhile, Israel's part is to study the Hebrew Scriptures and to seek her God in prayer.⁵

As you can see, prayer is not the reason for the chapter. The reason has to do with Israel's sin and their **breaking of covenant** with God, something that the people have **never dealt with**. But the reason for the chapter results in **the occasion for prayer**, and as much, prayer takes up the dominant position in the chapter.

Outlining Daniel 9 is a rather interesting exercise. There are simple outlines. I found one with **seven parts**:

⁵ Bejon, 10.

1. Preface (1-2)
2. Humility to Approach God (3)
3. Invocation Ascribing Honor to God (4)
4. Confession of Sin (5-15)
5. Petition (16-19)
6. High Drama: Gabriel Appears (20-23)
7. Gabriel's Vision of the Future (24-27)⁶

A simpler, more common approach has **four main** sections.

1. Rooted in Scripture (1-3)
2. Revealed in Confession (4-15)
3. Responds in Supplication (16-19)
4. Receives Answers (20-23)⁷

1. Daniel's Readiness to Pray (1-4a)
2. Daniel's Acknowledgement of Blame (4b-14)
3. Daniel's Request for Blessing (15-19)
4. God's Provision for Blessing (20-27)⁸

Even more simply, you essentially have **a prayer** and **an answer to it**.

The prayer itself can serve as a model for **the kinds of things** that should fill our prayers. We will see things such as

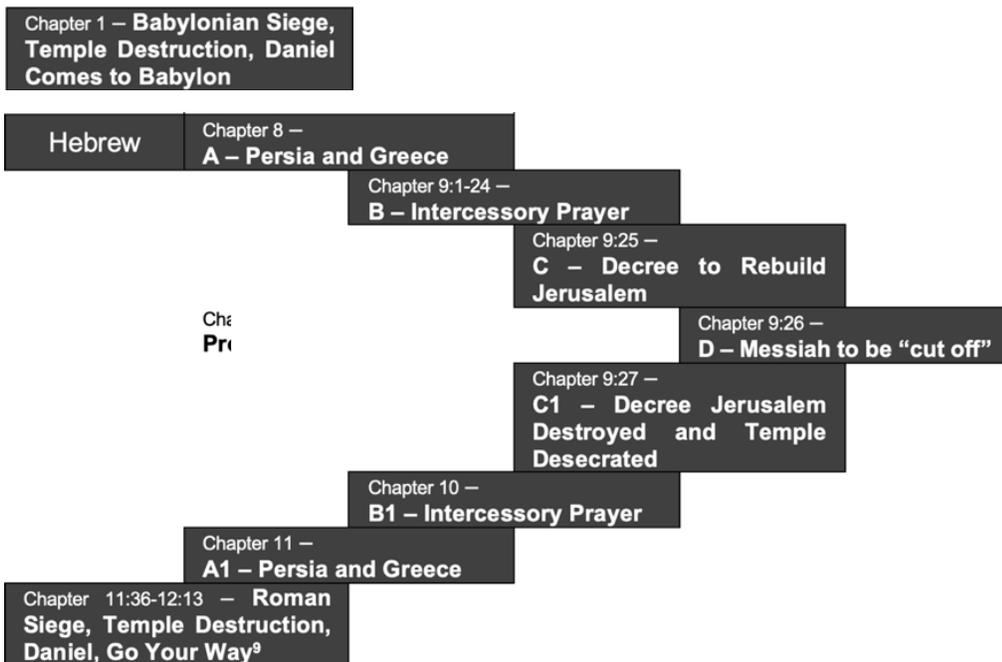
⁶ *Literary Study Bible: ESV*, ed. Leland Ryken and Philip Graham Ryken (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 1330.

⁷ **Scott I. Harris**, "Daniel's Prayer: An Example to Follow—Daniel 9:1-23," Grace Bible Church, NY (Nov 27, 2011), https://gracebibleny.org/daniel%C2%92s_prayer_example_follow_daniel_9123.

⁸ **James E. Rosscup**, "Prayer Relating to Prophecy in Daniel 9," *TMSJ* 3/1 (Spring 1992): 47-71. <https://www.tms.edu/m/tmsj3c.pdf>. This outline is much more detailed.

praising God, recounting his promises, filling the prayer with God’s own words, confessing faith and sin, and petitioning the throne of heaven.⁹ If you can see and learn from this, it will immensely help your own prayer life.

As we have seen in every chapter, we can also view Daniel 9 **chiastically**. There are at least three ways of approaching this. First, recall that in this second half of Daniel, we have returned to the Hebrew portion of the book. The two different languages have given us two different chiasms. Chapter 9’s prayer **parallels the intercessory prayer of chapter 10**. The literary center of chapters 8-12 fall at the end of chapter 9, **and we will look more at why next time**.



⁹ Most of the parts from the famous acronym ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication), which is a teaching device to learn what our prayers should be composed of, is present in Daniel’s prayer.

Second, we can **combine portions of chs. 8 and 9**, which is important because it helps us see that in fact the vision of the little horn is related to Daniel's prayer and God's answer given from Gabriel. In this case, the center of the two chapters is Daniel's whole prayer:

- A. Vision of the ram and the unigoat (8:2-12)
 - B. Revelation of the 2300 evenings and mornings (13-14)
 - C. First apparition of Gabriel, "one like a man" (15-18)
- A¹. Explanation of the vision (19-25)
 - B¹. The 2300 days is true, seal it up (26)
 - D. 1st reaction: Daniel Puzzled (27)
 - D¹. 2nd reaction. Daniel understands from the books a shorter time for final restoration (9:1-2)
 - E. Prayer: "Do not delay!" (3-20)**
 - C¹. Gabriel, that man Daniel saw in the preceding vision comes again (21)
 - B². Gabriel was sent to explain the vision and he emphatically cautions Daniel to understand what remained unexplained, i.e. the 2300 days (21-23)
 - B³. A period of 70 weeks is deducted till Messianic events in a 7+62+1 starting from "a word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem" (24-27)¹⁰

¹ Adapted from, **Florin Gh Laiu**, "An Exegetical Study of Daniel 7-9," Master of Theology to the University of South Africa (Nov 1999), 153 (see also p. 103).
https://www.academia.edu/8097015/An_Exegetical_Study_of_Daniel_7_9.

Finally, we can look at [ch. 9 by itself](#). When we do this, we see that it is a complex liturgical prayer made up of two parts followed by a beautifully parallel answer.

Daniel's Prayer Part I: Acknowledgement of Blame¹¹

- A. "We have sinned" (4-5)
 - B. "Our kings, our princes, and our fathers" (6)
 - C. "To us open shame" (7a)
 - D. To the Jews ... because of their treachery (7b)**
 - C¹. "To us ... open shame" (8a)
 - B¹. "Our kings, our princes, and our fathers" (8b)
- A¹. "We have sinned" (8c)
 - ²B. "His servants the prophets" (9-10)
 - ²C. All Israel has transgressed your law ... refusing to obey your voice (11a)**
 - ²B¹. "Moses the servant of God" (11b)
- ²A¹. "We have sinned" (11c)
 - ³B. "By brining upon us a great calamity" (12)
 - ²C. We have not entreated the favor of God or turned from sin (13)**
 - ³B¹. "The calamity and has brought it upon us" (14)
- ³A¹. "We have sinned" (15)¹²

¹¹ I've modified the following chiasm into four parts. I got the idea from the Biblical Chiasm Exchange on Daniel 9.

¹² See the Appendix for another visual way of processing this same chiastic outline.

Daniel's Prayer Part II: Plea for Blessing

- A. According to your righteous acts turn away your wrath from your city and people (16)
 - B. "Listen to the prayer of your servant" (17)**
- A¹. Not because of our righteousness, forgive your city and people (18-19)

Gabriel Arrival to Daniel:

- A. While I was speaking ... and presenting my plea (20)
 - B. Gabriel came to me (21)**
 - B¹. Gabriel spoke with me (22)**
- A¹. At the beginning of your please for mercy (23)

Gabriel Announcement to Daniel:

- A. Seventy Weeks (24a)
 - B. Decreed about your people (24b)
 - C. and your holy city (24c)
 - D. To finish the transgression (24d)
 - E. To put an end to sin (24e)
 - F. To atone for iniquity (24f)**
 - F¹. To bring in everlasting righteousness (24g)**
 - E¹. To seal both vision and prophet (24h)
 - D¹. To anoint a most holy place (24i)
 - C¹. Restore and build Jerusalem (25a)
 - B¹. The coming of an anointed one (25b)
- A¹. Seven weeks, sixty-two weeks ... one week (26-27)

Today our focus will be on the prayer and next time we will look at the answer.

Daniel's Prayer (Dan 9:3-15)

Eager to Pray

Remember again that Daniel has been deeply upset by his previous vision. This is the literary context into which ch. 9 is written. Now he is trying desperately to understand Jeremiah's prophecy. This is the immediate context. And thus, the first thing we see is that Daniel is eager to pray. "Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes" (3). When he doesn't understand something from God's word, he prays. He understands that only God can give insight into his own word. It is a lesson we all must heed.

In the previous verse it mentioned the Word of the LORD (Yahweh). In my understanding, Jeremiah was hearing from Christ—the Word. It is interesting in this regard that Daniel now turns his face to "Adonai Elohim," the "Lord God." Adonai is the term David uses for Christ in Psalm 110:1 (cf. Acts 2:34-35). We've seen Christ in virtually every chapter thus far, why not again in ch. 9?

Because it is a case of great distress and anxiety of soul, his prayer is **accompanied with fasting**, a physical means of withholding food from yourself in order to more deeply enter into a spiritual state that is willing and able to hear from God. Fasting is a spiritual discipline that **too few Christians use** in this day of any food available at one's beck and call. We have grown spiritually fat. Furthermore, he puts on **sackcloth and ashes**. This is the age-old sign of **humbling** oneself before God. No man of high pride takes off his Armani suit to rub his body with ashes only to put on a bag that holds food to feed the chickens and pigs. Daniel is serious about his prayer. If we are looking at our passage as a kind of model prayer, which isn't really the point, but I do think is acceptable as an application, this is the first thing to take away. If you want to pray better, you have to want it more and you should employ means that God has given you to aid in the endeavor.

Daniel's Confession: Saturated in Scripture

As Daniel begins his prayer it says that he made “**confession**” to the LORD (Yahweh) his God (Elohim) (4). Of what does his **confession** consist? As it regards prayer, we often think about the term in relation *to sin*. But as it regards

theological belief, we think about it in terms of **confessing our faith**. This is how he began. “O Lord (Adonai), the great and awesome God (El),¹³ who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments...” (4b). Daniel’s confession begins with **an acknowledgement of who his God is. He confesses his faith**. He doesn’t begin with himself or his people; he begins with God. This is as our Lord Jesus taught us in the Lord’s Prayer where we begin with a confession of faith. “Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed by your name...”

Many have noticed, not only here but even as we already saw with Jeremiah, that **Daniel is a man saturated in Scripture**. He isn’t just saying things. His confession is rooted in holy Scripture. In this case, he is deeply set in Deuteronomy. Chapter 7 tells us, “The LORD your God is in your midst, a great and awesome God ... Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations” (Dt 7:21, 9). And, of course, this is itself rooted in God’s self-disclosure in the **Ten Commandments** (Ex 20:6; Dt 5:10),

¹³ El means “mighty” or “strong,” so it is the most appropriate title to accompany these adjectives.

the Mosaic covenant. This is the next thing you have to learn about prayer. Prayer is, much more often than modern Christians exercise, **a speaking back Scripture to God**. Remember, prayer isn't a monologue. It is a conversation. This is God's way of speaking back to you in prayer. For, it is his word, not yours. I've never had God speak audibly to me in prayer. I have in his word. We will see much more of this as we move through Daniel's prayer.

After his brief confession of faith in this powerful, great, mighty, and awesome God, **Daniel turns to the other kind of confession: *sin***. “**We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules.**” “**We have sinned**” becomes a **fourfold refrain** of this prayer (**5, 8, 11, 15**). There are many things to say here. First, this is **the first of three movements** of the prayer that begin and end with “we have sinned.”

Second, Daniel describes **the enormity of sin**.¹⁴ In fact, he says the same thing **five different ways**. *Sin* equates to *doing wrong* which is *acting wickedly* which equals *rebellious* which is the same as *turning aside from God's commandments*. The last is the most important, because **God defines sin**. He does so in his law, his commandments. Sin is not what we

¹⁴ **Rosscup**, 58-59.

make up from our own fanciful imaginations of what they think should be right and wrong. This is God's prerogative because he is God and we are not. When we make up sins and put those upon other people, we act as if we were God.

Third, notice the plural—"we." Daniel is **praying not only for himself, but for his people**. Daniel is a **representative of God's people because he is a prophet of God**. God speaks to him and his job is to tell it to the people. As such, he is a mediator by his office. In this respect, he is acting in the capacity of that office. This is something that has been both lost and perverted in modern times. It is **lost** when churches no longer have corporate prayer and when the elder praying during the worship service does not confess corporately for the people. This is something we desperately need more of. We need public, corporate acknowledgment in the church that we have fallen short of God's glory. Both we and the world desperately need to hear that we Christians acknowledge that we are not higher and mightier than they, but we are sinners saved only by the grace of God. Judgment begins in the house of God.

On the other hand, there is **a new perversion** of this that is gathering steam in the church which is getting it **from godless and wicked people** who have perverted this idea

profoundly. Perhaps they are doing it because we have forgotten it, and nature abhors a vacuum. We are seeing a kind of Bizarro-Superman form of corporate repentance that is making inroads [through social justice and critical theory](#) which is now being imposed upon Christians as a duty and a law in many churches. One of the main ideas is that [all white people](#)—especially white male Christians—are necessarily guilty of the sin of racism. White people have power. White people have privilege. They have not had to deal with what it means to be a slave. White people have created this culture. This culture is systemically racist. So, whether we recognize it or not, this necessarily makes us racists. Therefore, our job is to realize this and then repent of this “sin” and begin to make tangible “restitution” to those who have not been in power but have been systemically downtrodden by this evil patriarchal Christian white racist system.

This perversion is doing a couple of nasty things. First, in classic postmodern fashion, it is [redefining what racism is](#). No longer is it a despicable *personal belief and act* of discrimination or harassment or worse towards another human being of a different nationality where you believe they are by nature inferior to you; it is *a status* that all white

people have by virtue of their birth (and no, this doesn't work in reverse, even if minorities in our country are the majority in their own). Therefore, no matter how many times you "repent," it can never be enough, because you can't change the color of your skin. Second, they **aren't making you repent to God, but to them!** Let me see the kind of God that Daniel repents to in light of the law of God that I have broken, for I will see that he is a merciful and kind and forgiving God. But do not let me fall into the hardened calloused hands of social justice warriors who don't want forgiveness but restitution and revenge!

A fourth and final thing to note about this part of the prayer is that it, too, is **grounded in Scripture**. I'm specifically thinking here about God's **covenant blessings and curses in Deuteronomy and Leviticus**, though we could think of many places thereafter, including Jeremiah, which harken back to this. Think about when God said, **"If you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, then I will do this to you"** (**Lev 26:15-16**), and then God lists off a series of devastating desolations. These are the very things Daniel is thinking about in this seventy years of captivity and in the sacrilege that will make the

temple desolate. The people have **broken covenant** and therefore have sinned against God and done so on a massive level.

He goes into more depth. “**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**” (6). This demonstrates precisely what I’m talking about. Daniel is thinking long and hard about **God’s law and covenant** and the prophets who have brought so many **covenant lawsuits** against the people, especially through the wicked actions of their leaders.

He now combines the confession of faith with the confession of sin. “**To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame...**” (7). Again, Daniel is thinking about the covenant curses. In Leviticus 26, public open shame comes upon the people in the form of **unburied corpses, desolate sanctuaries, devastated land, scattering of exiles, faintness of heart, no power over enemies**, and so on (**Lev 26:29-40**). And Daniel makes it clear that God has struck one and all: **the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, all Israel, those near, those far away, those in Babylon, all have committed treachery against the LORD** (7). Vs. 7 is **the first of three central verses in this prayer**, and so we are going to

see much more of this. The prayer acts like a kind of symphony of sin as it repeats but builds upon these same themes. As such, I simply do not see how prayer can be something effective or life changing for any person if they aren't entering into confession of faith and sin, for this is how we humble ourselves before the Most High and understand our place rightly.

Notice, now, **the repetition**. “To us, O LORD, belongs open shame” (8a). “To our kings, to our princes, to our fathers” (8b). “Because we have sinned against you” (8c). A second movement of the prayer now begins with those words. This movement now adds upon the first. Again, he begins with **a confession of faith**. “To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness” (9a). That’s the kind of God he is confessing to, not angry hateful men or gods bent on retribution where no repentance is ever enough, but **the God of mercy and forgiveness**. Now then combines it again with sin. “For we have rebelled against him 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” (9b-10). Why **repeat** himself like this? Because it is a way of **helping him, and us, understand** the great need we have of really internalizing our sin and God’s forgiveness. We don’t need

his forgiveness if we never sin. And we have no hope as sinners if he won't forgive. We are prone to forget each of these things at various times in our lives. When we are in the midst of sinning, we tend to forget that we are doing it. When we are in the midst of despair and discipline, we tend not to believe in his forgiveness.

The **second center** comes in vs. **11a**. “All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice.” This is parallel to the first center: “because of the treachery that they have committed against you.”

It is followed by **more repetition**. First, he thinks about the covenant curses again. “And the **curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us**” (**11b**). Then he returns to the beginning with their sin, “because we have sinned against him” (**11c**). With those words, **the third movement begins**.

Again, it moves into another confession. This time he begins not with God's greatness, but with his **faithfulness**. “He has confirmed his words...” (**12a**). But this faithfulness is not good news, because here, God is being **faithful to his promises to send disaster** because of sin. It continues, “... 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” (12). In this way, yet again a confession of faith is combined with a confession of sin.

The third center now comes and sounds much like the first two. “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” (13). But this sets the stage for the first good news of the prayer, at least as far as it concerns Israel. They have not yet entreated the favor of the LORD our God. This is their God, not some foreign god who couldn’t care less. And their God can be favorably disposed.

This word “favor” (*chalah*) can mean “to be appeased.” How does one appease a god? Always through sacrifices. But that takes us to the heart of the problem. There is no temple. And Daniel has seen signs that the temple will be desolate, which has to still be in the future. Yet, that temple will be restored. No wonder the poor man is confused and entreating God. It’s enough to make your head spin. But again, this word sets the stage for something marvelous to come.

Daniel's Entreaty: Please God, Forgive!

But first, Daniel's prayer transitions. It moves **from confession** (of faith and sin) **to petition**. This is Lewis' movement from high to low prayer, where the Christian entreats God for something. But again, don't think of that as a bad thing. It isn't.

As before, he begins with a **confession of faith**. “**O Lord, according to all your righteous acts...**” (16a). God is righteous and so Daniel is appealing to the righteousness God to act righteously, as he always has in the past. To this he combines his **petition**. “**...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**” (16b). Upon what basis is Daniel appealing to God's righteousness to be acted upon? Not on the basis of their sin. That would be ridiculous. It would not be righteous at all for God to turn away his wrath *because people sin*. It might be merciful, but in and of itself, that is anything but righteous. Even if Daniel is confessing them at the moment, this cannot be the basis, because sin—even confessed sin—still has to be punished according to the

standard of righteousness. Keep that thought in mind for later.

No, the standard is God's promises. Again, we have to think of Scripture. God had promised to Abraham that he would bless his descendants, make them multiply and prosper. Right now, that promise is being forgotten. Therefore, Daniel is calling upon God to remember his covenant promises, not according to law, but according to his unconditional word. If you want to put this into covenant categories, we can say that Daniel is calling upon God to remember, not his covenant of works, but his covenant of grace. That grace is rooted solely in the character and promises of God. Daniel knows this because he knows the holy Scripture. Therefore, his prayer is already effective, even if God should choose not to answer it as Daniel requests. Why? Because this is how a true relationship with the living God is produced, and it is being demonstrated in Daniel's incredible prayer of faith.

The center of the petition comes in vs. 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." This is the exact same theology as the previous

statement. God is **merciful**. Daniel knows this because God has told him so, has proven it over and over, and Daniel **believes** it. He has faith. Now, he is asking his God to have mercy because of his own sake, because that's who he is, because that's what he has promised, especially in his promises that if they turn from their evil ways, he will relent. I don't think Daniel is acting rashly here, either. I believe after 70 years of discipline in a Babylonian Captivity, the **people's hearts have softened**. Daniel is not speaking out of turn. They are no longer hardened. God's chastisement has done its work. They are ready to turn back to God, as Ezra and Nehemiah will soon demonstrate.

This petition to have mercy concludes in **vv. 18-19**. “**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. 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.**” Suddenly, Daniel **moves to the first person**: “**my**” God. This is **personal**. All prayer, even for others, must be. This time it is unmistakable. Do not answer because of our righteousness,

for we are sinful and rebellious at heart. My God, answer because of your great mercy. Look upon what you have done to us in your wrath and remember your promises. *Incline* your ear. *Open* your eyes. *See. Hear. Forgive. Pay attention* and act. *Do not delay*. These are all imperatives. Daniel is *commanding* God! But only because he knows the Scripture and knows that this is how God has made prayer.

That famous pseudo-prayer from Lewis, as I said, has as its climax, “*Prayer doesn’t change God, it changes me.*” This is right, but doesn’t say enough. No, prayer does not change God. His nature is not affected by our prayers. He is infinitely full of all his attributes at all times. We, on the other hand, are changed when we pray. That’s how God has ordained it. *At the same time*, Daniel is telling God to change the way he is acting towards his people *at the present moment*.

This does not necessitate somehow God changing the future, which he knows perfectly already. It means *changing Daniel’s present* with divine mercy that will lead to the blessing of God again. So there is, in fact, a sense in which prayer really does change things. Petitioning God to act is not wasted energy. Don’t get caught up in a philosophical trap that because God exhaustively knows and ordains the

future that prayer is meaningless. Rather, trust in his word that he both knows the future exhaustively, ordains all that comes to pass, and uses means—especially the means of prayer—to act favorably in this world. But in that, remember that such prayers must never be offered in ignorance or upon faulty premises. That’s the beauty of Daniel’s prayer. He knows the Scripture and is essentially [praying God’s word back to Him](#).

Gabriel’s Arrival

It is at this moment that [Gabriel arrives](#) for a second time in this book. This arrival helps to connect chs. 8-9. Daniel summarizes what we’ve just said about prayer. “[While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God...](#)” (20). Daniel is using a well-known description of [God’s holy hill](#), the mountain upon which he chooses to make his abode. In this case, it is Mt. Zion.

“[While I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice](#)” (21). Now, this is many years after that first vision, which was in the first year

of Belshazzar. The archangel is veritably flying towards Daniel. And, curiously, it is “at the time of the evening sacrifice.” You’ll see why this is so curious as he begins to explain why he has come.

Daniel says, “He made me understand” (22). That’s the purpose of this visitation. The angel spoke, “O Daniel, I have no come out to give you insight and understanding. At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved” (23a). This is an important word for all Christians to hear. It isn’t just Daniel who is greatly loved. God loves all of his chosen ones with the special love of a husband to a bride. The whole point is that *he* set his love upon us. If you are in Christ, he loves you because it pleased him to do so. Do you think this would have encouraged the prophet? In the same way, it must encourage you, especially as you think about this great topic of prayer.

Gabriel says, “Therefore consider the word and understand the vision. ‘Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city...’” (24a). This is a very curious thing to say. Remember, Jeremiah had predicted seventy years of Babylonian captivity. But the angel talks about seventy “weeks” with Daniel. In prophetic time, a

“week” equals seven years. All commentators are agreed upon this one part of Gabriel’s message. Daniel is being told about a much longer period of seventy than Jeremiah was given. Will see next time that it is seventy years *times seven*.

What will happen at the end of the seventy weeks? Six things. I believe these six are in chiasmic parallel, so that the first and sixth parallel, the second and fifth parallel, and the third and fourth parallel. In order this will:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| (1) finish the transgression | (6) anoint a most holy place |
| (2) put an end to sin | (5) seal both vision and prophet |
| (3) atone for iniquity | (4) bring in everlasting righteousness |

How are these parallel. Where is transgression “finished” (1)? At the temple, the most holy place (2). What does atoning for iniquity (3) do? It brings in righteousness (4), through forgiveness and more. So how would we know that God has put an end to sin (2)? By a prophecy that confirms the vision and prophet (5). In all this, how does God deal with transgression, put an end to sin, atone for iniquity, bring in righteousness? Through sacrifice. Where does sacrifices occur? At the holy place. Remember he came at the time of sacrifice? Now you know why.

This is an incredible answer to prayer. Daniel asks God to tell him about the good news of the end of the seventy years because of their sin. **God does him one better** and instead tells him about the good news *of all sin* in Christ. Daniel has petitioned God to have mercy. But God can't have mercy upon sinners in his righteousness, unless sin is punished. Now, God is punishing Israel at that moment, so temporarily speaking, **typologically** speaking, on the level of nations and corporate sin—**God could have mercy** because he has punished the people for their sins.

But Gabriel is talking about something **much deeper**, more lasting than this. Something is going to happen at the end of the seventy weeks which will put away the need for any more sacrifices whatsoever. All sin will be atoned and put to an end in the Most Holy Place.

When will this take place? This is a question I can't answer today, but we can at least look at the end of the passage to see how Gabriel answers it. **“Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, where shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one**

shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator” (25-27). There’s a lot going on here, that we will look at next time.

For now, it is enough to ask a couple of questions. Who puts an end to sacrifice and offering? Who is the “anointed one,” a word that means Messiah? Has the Messiah come? Has sacrifice and offering be put to an end? The answers are yes. It has, and yes, he has. His name is Jesus Christ and his work at the cross is the ultimate fulfillment of this passage. There’s a timeline and everything to go with it.

Jesus is the answer that Gabriel gives to Daniel. Jesus *in human flesh*, the same as ch. 7. And it says that Daniel understood what Gabriel was saying. How? Because he knew that a Messiah was coming. I believe it was Daniel who made known to the magi of the east that a star would come out of Jacob (Num 24:17). Now, he is given a precise

timeline for that coming. No wonder they came to Bethlehem with such a man as this heading up the guild of the magicians of the east.

The Valley of Vision

I'm going to finish our discussion of this here for today, in order not to lose our **focus on prayer**. I want to return to my questions at the beginning. Why would the Lewis of *Shadowlands* say that he prays because he can't help himself? Why would I not be able to help myself in answering a question about praying without ceasing? The answer is given in the fullness of our quotation. *"I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time – waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God- it changes me."* This is it, you see? **A true Christian cannot help but to pray—all the time**. Not just because we know ourselves helpless, but because as much as breathing is the need of our body, prayer is the need for the awakened soul. God has put his Spirit, his very Breath into our souls and through prayer that Breathe returns back to the God to sent it.

Even if we haven't put it into words, this is known implicitly by anyone who has seen the Living God personally for themselves. Not with their physical eyes, but with the

eyes of faith. We are the saints, those who have had God reveal himself to us. We have seen the face of God in Christ. We now know him and have been given a personal relationship with the living God such that we cannot help now to but be in that relationship. Even when we are sinning, we know we are in that relationship. We can't escape it. The Hound of Heaven is always there ... in grace.

There is a famous prayer found in a book called *The Valley of Vision*. This is a collection of *Puritan Prayers* put together by Arthur Bennett. Tested through the fires of suffering but beholding the beauty of God through biblically grounded theology, perhaps no other group of Christians in history has learned and practice the discipline of prayer as the Puritans did.

Daniel has seen visions. He has seen visions of God. So listen to how this particular prayer *puts together the vision of God* with the inescapable desire to pray to and know him.

Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly,
Thou hast brought me to the valley of vision,
 where I live in the depths but see thee in the heights;
 hemmed in by mountains of sin I behold thy glory.
Let me learn by paradox
 that the way down is the way up,
 that to be low is to be high,
 that the broken heart is the healed heart,

that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit,
that the repenting soul is the victorious soul,
that to have nothing is to possess all,
that to bear the cross is to wear the crown,
that to give is to receive,
that the valley is the place of vision.

Lord, in the daytime stars can be seen from deepest wells,
and the deeper the wells the brighter thy stars shine;
Let me find thy light in my darkness,
thy life in my death,
thy joy in my sorrow,
thy grace in my sin,
thy riches in my poverty
thy glory in my valley.¹⁵

This is **the high prayer**, consisting of communication between the Spirit of God and the spirit of a man or woman or believing child. This high prayer is the **life-breath** of the Christian. It makes its way into more formal prayers which consist, even as we have seen with Daniel, though adoration, confession of faith, confession of sin, supplication, and, thanksgiving. Your prayers should consist of these kinds of things, rooted deeply in the word of God which you are reading and memorizing and making your own.

¹⁵ **Arthur Bennett** (ed.), *The Valley of Vision: A collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975).

A great way for you to **strengthen your prayer life** is to do what this and so many other Puritans and Christians, including Daniel, have done. Do not just pray extemporaneous prayers (which your whole life should include). But **spend some time crafting deep prayers** of your soul on paper or reading those of the saints who have gone before you. Daniel's prayer has been called a high liturgical prayer, and it was copied and emulated in other places in the ancient world. Formal prayer, informal prayer, high prayer, low prayer, prayers of petition and prayers of confession, all these things are to be gleaned from Daniel's great prayer of Daniel 9.

But **the fuel for it all**, the only thing that makes it work, is the revelation that Jesus has come and has been merciful—in answer to that very prayer. Daniel has received an answer to prayer that fits perfectly against the backdrop of a new dawn, a new empire. In that answer, God has brought about his own brand-new thing as he ushered in the kingdom of God in its new covenant order through Jesus Christ. Because of him, God hears us and loves when we talk to him. Because of him, he has made a way whereby we will be heard and answered. In this time of **desperate need for our country and world**, as perhaps we have not seen in any of our lifetimes,

pray to *your* God as David has here. As you do, behold the Vision of God in the face of Christ anew.

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Appendix: Rearranging the Chiasm of Daniel 9's Prayer to View it Differently

Start here

<p>4 "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. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name</p>	<p>because we have sinned against you.</p>		<p>because we have sinned against him.</p>		<p>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.</p>
<p>to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.</p>	<p>to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers,</p>				
<p>⁷ To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness,</p>		<p>⁹ To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness,</p>		<p>¹² He has confirmed his words,</p>	<p>¹⁴ Therefore the LORD has kept</p>
<p>but to us open shame,</p>	<p>⁸ To us, O LORD, belongs open shame,</p>	<p>for we have rebelled against him¹⁰ and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by walking in his laws,</p>		<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
		<p>which he set before us by his servants the prophets.</p>	<p>And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us,</p>	<p>¹³ As it is written in the Law of Moses,</p>	
<p>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.</p>		<p>¹¹ All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice.</p>		<p>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.</p>	