

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker  
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## Daniel 9:1-19 “A Pattern for Prayer”

Intro. In this chapter we find one of the greatest and longest prayers in the entire Bible. If one were to choose the ten greatest chapters of the Bible on the subject of prayer, this chapter would be included on most lists. These verses do not directly teach about prayer, but they do contain a great example of prayer, and there is much we can learn here about prayer. We should expect to find such a prayer from a man like Daniel. This prayer of Daniel is actually a culmination of a life of prayer, as evidenced by the book of Daniel. For example, in chapter 6 Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den because he refused to stop his practice of praying 3 times a day to his God. Daniel was a great man of God because he was faithful in his prayer life.

Do you have a prayer life? Do you have a daily quiet time with the Lord? Such a daily time of Bible reading and prayer is vital for our spiritual growth and vitality. If you do not have a daily quiet time, I hope you will be encouraged by Daniel’s example.

And now let’s see some of the truths about prayer that we can learn from Daniel’s prayer. If you have not yet developed a good prayer life, I hope that the message tonight will help guide you in *how* you should pray. He includes most of the key elements of prayer in this particular prayer.

Now the first principle that I have drawn from Daniel’s prayer is this:

### I. PRAY ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD [don’t spend too much time on this]

The Medes and the Persians had just conquered Babylon. Daniel was seeking answers as to what would happen to his people. So Daniel looked into the Word of God. Daniel was educated, and it is expected that he read the sacred writings of the Old Testament. As he read from Jeremiah, he got excited by what he found there. And that reading of the Word of God led to this great prayer. In v.2 we read, “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.” In Jer. 25:11-12 & 29:10, God had said that Israel would return from captivity after 70 years. That settled the duration of the captivity, but not the start of the 70 years. If the 70 years began with the first captivity of 605 B.C., then the captivity was nearly over. This marvelous discovery is what inspired Daniel’s prayer. He realized that it would be right to pray for Israel’s return from captivity. Now before this time such a prayer would have been contrary to God’s will, because He had purposed to judge Israel for their sin. In fact, God told Jeremiah 3 different times not to pray for his people (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11), for it was too late. Judgment would certainly fall because of their sin but now Daniel realized that God’s 70 years of judgment had just about run its course. So based on that prophecy, he understood that he could begin praying for Judah’s restoration to Jerusalem and the land of Judah.

This principle of prayer is found elsewhere in Scripture. 1 Jn. 5:14b, 15b says, “If we ask anything according to His will, he hears us; and ...we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.” Jesus taught us in the model prayer that we should pray, “...Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven” (KJV). So our prayer requests should be consistent with the will of God. Prayer is not for the purpose of changing the mind or purposes of God. Prayer is to get us in line with God’s will, which is best for us all. Prayer is to line us up with the purposes of God. It is to get

involved in what God is going to do. I get weary of people going around trying to force God to do something, claiming and demanding things from God. Prayer is not to get God in line with our will, but to get *us* in line with *God's* will!

So what should we do? 1) Read and Learn the Word of God. Unless we understand God's Word, we cannot understand the purposes and plans of God in order to govern and guide our prayers. Other than a brief opening prayer, I read my Bible before my prayer time. I feel I do some of my best praying *after* reading from the Bible. So read God's Word and then: 2) Pray - Even though God had sovereignly declared that Israel would return from captivity, Daniel somehow felt the responsibility to pray. Daniel's request is found in v.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." He asked God not to delay His purpose to restore Israel to their homeland, and end their captivity. Just because God has purposed to do something doesn't mean we do not need to pray that He do it. God has chosen to limit much of the fulfillment of His purposes and will to our prayers and service. For example, God has purposed to save "the elect," but that does not mean that we have no need to pray and witness to the unsaved. God has also purposed the means whereby He will accomplish His purposes.

A second principle we learn about prayer from Daniel is that we should:

## II. PRAY WITH FERVENCY

James 5:16b says, "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." Well we see in our text clear evidence that Daniel prayed with fervency. V.3 says, "And I set my face unto the Lord God." If you really want something, it is best to ask someone face to face. That may be the word picture here. So there was a passion, a persistence, and an intensity in his prayer as he sought the Lord. This fervency is also seen in the last of v.3 where we read of Daniel praying "with fasting and sackcloth and ashes." Daniel was so earnest in his praying that he was not interested in food. Prayer for Daniel was a real exercise of soul in spiritual travail. Such prayer is arduous work. It requires effort and endurance and suffering. Also, in v.19, the fervency is seen in the rapid, brief requests (read with fervency). Someone may have said, "Why are you so concerned and fervent, Daniel? It's all going to turn out anyway." But that's not Daniel's attitude.

Jacob prayed with fervency. You recall that he wrestled with the angel all night long. In his prayer he cried, "...I will not let You go unless You bless me!" (Gen. 32:26).

Have you ever prayed with such fervency that you went without food for an extended period of time? When was the last time you prayed with tears? Do your prayers really demonstrate that you care about lost souls?

Daniel's example teaches something else about prayer:

## III. INCLUDE CONFESSION IN YOUR PRAYER

This is especially true when our sins may hinder God from answering our prayer. Psalm 66:18 says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear." So Daniel did not almost immediately begin to make petition to the Lord in His prayer. Rather, his emphasis was on making earnest confession concerning the sin of his people. Confession takes up *eleven* verses, and petition takes up four. Daniel understood that sin had to be dealt with before God could show favor once again. Otherwise, he probably felt that the end of the captivity could be delayed.

So what should we do?

A. Confess Your Own Sin – Notice in v.20 that Daniel confessed both his sin and the sin of his people Israel. Even though he was one of the godliest men of the Old Testament, he knew he was a sinner. After all, the closer to the light of God you get, the more clearly you can see your own sinfulness. You never get to the point where you no longer need to confess sin. You never in this life attain sinless perfection. Daniel was candid and straightforward in his confession. He got right down to business with God.

B. Identify with Others in Your Confession - Daniel may have started with himself, but he didn't stop there. The pronouns change to the first person plural. In vv.5-16 he identified himself with his people Israel and confessed on their behalf. The sins that he went on to confess were mainly those of Israel, in which he himself had been little, if any, involved. But still he confessed as though he were as blameworthy as any. He didn't stand apart as if he were self-righteous. A self-righteous man would have repudiated such an identification with chastened sinners. The essence of his confession was also to say, "We deserve the judgment we're getting." Thus, he gives honor unto God for His justice and righteous.

I believe we need to confess the sins of our nation. They are many. In so doing, we not only honor the righteousness of God, but we also repudiate sin. Yet too many in our nation not only fail to confess sin, they even celebrate sin! Sometimes we also need to confess the sins of our church, for at times we fail to obey God in certain areas.

C. Be Specific in Your Confession - By using different words to describe their sin, Daniel showed that they were guilty from every angle in v.5. They had sinned, i.e. missed the mark. They committed iniquity, i.e. distorted God's way and acted perversely. They did wickedly, i.e., they did wrong and knew it. They rebelled, i.e. defied authority. Also, Daniel is specific in his confession. He labels each sin. It isn't enough to go to God and give a general confession saying, "I have sinned." Note the following examples of sin he confesses:

1. Disobedience in Departing – In v.5 he says, "We have sinned... by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments." Israel had sinned because the people had turned away from God's commandments and judgments.

Our nation has certainly departed from the precepts of the Lord.

2. Failure to Follow and Obey – He says in v.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." They just would not listen to the prophets. Likewise, he prayed in v.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."

There are many church members who have not come to church to listen to God's Word through His preacher! And even those who do hear the preacher often do not *do* what God's Word says.

3. We Are Getting What We Deserve – Look what Daniel prays in vv.11-12, "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. 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." In Dt. 28:15ff God promised Israel that curses would be the consequence of disobedience. He indeed confirmed His

words. “Confirmed” means “to cause to stand.” God had caused His warning of a curse to stand, by fulfilling it in this severe manner. God means what He says. God had forewarned them, and they were without excuse. And when God chastens you for sin, you must accept the responsibility for that chastening and never blame God. Do what Daniel did, and confess that you deserve what is happening to you. Don’t be like Adam and Eve, and blame others for your sin, or make excuses. If you go to God and make excuses for your sin, if you say to Him, “Lord, you know that I am weak and I was in this and that circumstance,” you are blaming your sin upon God. You are saying that God has been too hard on you! My friend, you and I are getting exactly what we deserve when God judges us.

4. We Have Been Indifferent to Destruction – Daniel says in v.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.” Daniel confessed that even when the pain of judgment came, they still didn’t repent from their sins, confessing them and seeking God’s forgiveness in prayer. How it must have grieved Daniel to confess this! This reminds me of Rev. 9:20, where it says that men suffering under a future, end time judgment of God will refuse to repent.

Why does God want us to confess our sin? One reason is to acknowledge that what we have done is wrong and confess with a spirit of repentance. God does not want us to turn around and repeat the same sin yet again.

Have you ever confessed the sins of your ancestors? Daniel does that in v.16 (see also Neh. 9:2). There is such a thing as generational sins, sinful habits that seem to be passed down from one generation to another (2 Kings 15:9). One way to break that cycle of sin is to confess the sins of your parents, grandparents.

At this point Daniel could rightly wonder, “Lord, with all of the sin and rebellion of your people, will you still deliver them, and restore them to their land? Well, this leads to my next point about prayer:

#### IV. BRING YOUR REQUESTS IN LIGHT OF GOD’S CHARACTER

Daniel knew that what he wanted to ask of God was humanly impossible. How could a severely weakened, small nation go back and rebuild their nation? How would the Medes and the Persians even permit this? Furthermore, if God were like the gods of the Babylonians, it really wouldn’t do a lot of good to ask for forgiveness because they believed their gods were evil, cruel, and held grudges. Yet Daniel understood that he could offer His petition based on what he knew about the character of God. It also may be noteworthy that chapter 9 is the only place in Daniel where the personal name for God is used. In fact, it is used seven times. This name depicts God as the gracious, covenant-keeping God of Israel. So Daniel was very mindful of the character of His God, and how that makes a great difference in prayer. Your theology will affect the kind of prayers that you pray. So note some of the attributes of God that are recognized here. First, He is:

A. All-Powerful – Notice in v.4 that Daniel acknowledges that God is a “great and awesome God.” The word “great” means “powerful.” Daniel is saying, “I pray to God because God is powerful enough to respond.” One evidence of His great power is mentioned in v.15, He brought His “people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand.” V.4 also says that God is “awesome.” That word means, “one to be feared,” partly because He is so powerful.

It's wonderful to pray to God who is omnipotent, isn't it? God spoke through Jeremiah, "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know" (33:3). Jesus said in Matthew 19:26, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." If you are praying to a weak god, then you aren't going to ask him to do much, are you? Do your prayers indicate that you believe that God is weak, or strong?

B. Faithful – This means that you can count on God to keep His promises. In v.4 Daniel acknowledged that God "keeps His covenant." When you pray, it is important that you understand that God is a covenant keeping God. That means that when God makes a promise, He keeps it. God keeps all covenants He makes.

When you know of a promise from God, you can ask God to fulfill His promise to you.

C. Loving – In the last of v.4 he says that God keeps "mercy with those who love Him." The word for "mercy" is *hesed* in Hebrew, and is often translated "loving kindness," but it carries the additional thought of steadfastness on God's part in granting kindness or love. Such mercy is an expression of His love. He forgives because he loves. Not only does He keep His covenants, but He always extends steadfast love to man in his frailty and inability to live up to them. There is significance in the fact that Daniel puts the two thoughts together.

D. Merciful – In vv.9 & 18 a different Hebrew word for "mercy" is found (*racham*), which carries the idea of mercy that is bestowed based on compassion. Daniel knew they didn't deserve anything from the Lord, but yet he made his petition based on the fact that God is compassionate and merciful.

Because God is loving and merciful, He is also:

E. Forgiving – Daniel says in v.9, "To the Lord our God belong mercy (*racham*) and forgiveness<sup>1</sup>..." That God is compassionate and forgiving may be the heart of it all. The only hope that Daniel had for the restoration of his people was based on the forgiveness of God. I like the fact that God's forgiveness appears in the plural in the KJV. Aren't you glad that God forgives over and over again? I am, because I've needed it more than once.

Isn't it wonderful to know that our God is a forgiving God? Unlike God, some people refuse to forgive and they hold on to a grudge. What a blessing it is to be forgiven!

Do you see how your understanding of the nature and character of God can make such a difference in your prayer life?

Finally, we see from Daniel's prayer that we should:

## V. PRAY FOR WITH A VIEW TOWARD GOD'S GLORY

Too often our prayers are focused upon our own needs and wants. However, Daniel kept the glory of God in proper focus while he prayed. Look with me at vv.16-19, "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. 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. O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations,

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<sup>1</sup> This word (*c<sup>o</sup>liychah*) is only found 3 times in the Old Testament, though the verb form is found 46 times.

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. 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 was concerned about God’s glory. In essence he is saying here, “Your reputation is at stake. Vindicate Your name. Don’t let Your name be slandered” (v.19). Daniel desired that God add to the glory of His “name” by showing His power in delivering His people again. God’s name had been dishonored, for it seemed to Israel’s neighbors that Babylon’s gods were more powerful than Israel’s God (v.16). Now that is mature prayer. People often pray only for their own sake, forgetting that the ultimate purpose of prayer is to bring glory to God. The model prayer Jesus taught us concludes by saying, “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen” (Mt. 6:13b). All prayer should be made for the Lord’s sake. Even when we pray for a soul to be saved, we should not do so just for the sake of that individual, but also that God may be glorified for His saving grace (cf. Eph. 2:7).

Conclusion: That kind of praying brings marvelous results. Next week we are going to see God’s answer in vv.20ff (read vv.20-21).

Back in 1787 the constitutional convention was being convened. They became hopelessly deadlocked with disagreement. Elderly Benjamin Franklin arose and called upon the convention to begin each day with prayer and supplication to God. After that, they were able to work out agreements and they came up with a constitution that has served us well for all these years. It was largely the result of an acknowledgement of the need for prayer.<sup>2</sup>

Sources: John MacArthur, Jr., *An Uncompromising Life* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1983); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 2 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973); Jerry Vines (notes from Bible study tape of 5/21/80). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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<sup>2</sup> Summarized from Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #4569* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979), Illus.#C-2246.