

Daniel
Chapter 9:1-19
The Prayers of a Righteous Man
"....the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." James 5:16b

Daniel 9:1-19

Daniel's Prayer

1 In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom— 2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. 3 So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.

4 I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed:

"Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 5 we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. 6 We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.

7 "Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame—the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. 8 We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, Lord, because we have sinned against you. 9 The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him; 10 we have not obeyed the Lord our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets. 11 All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you.

"Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you. 12 You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing on us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem. 13 Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come on us, yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth. 14 The Lord did not hesitate to bring the disaster on us, for the Lord our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him.

15 "Now, Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for Yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong. 16 Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, Your city, Your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors have made Jerusalem, and your people, an object of scorn to all those around us.

17 "Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For Your sake, Lord, look with favor on Your desolate sanctuary. 18 Give ear, our God, and hear; open Your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of You because we are righteous, but because of Your great mercy. 19 Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people bear Your Name."

Introduction

The reign of the Babylonians had come to an end, and the time of the Medo-Persian rule was just beginning. In **Chapter Nine** we see Daniel, nearing the end of his life, enduring yet another hardship, adjusting to the rigorous demands of regime change. Once again the faithful servant of God finds himself surrounded by clouds of upheaval, and an overwhelming sense of uncertainty regarding his future. Had it not been for the sovereignty of God, Daniels very life might have been in danger in these perilous times, for new kings would often establish their reign by executing those who had served with distinction in the former kingdom. Daniel had most definitely served the Babylonians with distinction, but God protects him during this transition, and he would soon become the new king Darius' most trusted adviser (**Dan. 6:3**).

As he had always done before, Daniel would continue to serve these, his new masters, with honor, and integrity. His heart, however longed for the end of this bondage and servitude. In short, he wanted to be free. Free to live in the land of his people, and free to worship his God in the holy city of Jerusalem. To once again hear the singing of Psalms as the congregation of Israel ascended to the Temple Mount to worship the One True God. Free from the daily infestation of immorality, paganism, and idol worship. Daniel must have truly been able to identify with Abraham's nephew Lot, who was so distressed while living among the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, (**2 Peter 2:7-8**) for he had spent these seventy long years in similar fashion. Sometimes I find myself facing these same feelings of sorrow as I look at the world around me and come to the stark realization that I will never really belong here, for this world is not my home.

In the first year of Darius' reign, Daniel begins to reflect upon a lifetime spent in captivity along with his fellow Jews. God had declared through the prophet Jeremiah that the captivity of the Jewish people would last for seventy years (**Jer. 25:11-12**). Daniel knew that by every reckoning the time of return to his beloved city was now at hand. He believed the word of the Lord and therefore began to search the scrolls of Jeremiah and pray for the emancipation, and restoration of His people. Daniel knew that it was because of the rebellious nature of the children of Israel, that God had brought His wrath upon them. Daniel also realized that in order to find the mercy of God, repentance was needed. The Jewish people had done exactly what the prophet Jeremiah had instructed them to do, settle in the land of Babylon, building houses for themselves, taking wives, and bearing children (**Jer. 29:4-7**). Daniel must have worried, that they might become too comfortable living in Babylon, and rather than repent for their transgressions, forget God altogether, and little by little forsake the heritage and plans that God had for them. Daniel decided to repent on behalf of his people, literally taking their sins upon himself even though he had never been unfaithful to God in his life. He humbled himself and repented. This high ranking official in the government, the wisest in all the land, took off his expensive robes, and dressed himself in sackcloth (a rough fabric associated with grief and sorrow), he placed ashes upon his head in a display of mourning and fasted and prayed for the people of Israel. In short, Daniel became a living example of what the Son of God would one day do for the sins of the entire world. He who knew no sin, became sin for us. Jesus gave up his royalty and took the form of a lowly servant and gave his life to save a people who had become comfortable in their sinful condition, and were undeserving of redemption. He loved us, in spite of our wickedness, and gave His all so that we could return to the promised land with Him. Hallelujah!

Daniel passionately prayed for his beloved Jewish people, and God's mercies upon them. He poured his heart out to God the Father on behalf of the people and the city that bear His name (**vs.19**). It is one of the most powerful prayers in all of scripture, giving us insight into the tender heart of this man of God, who in spite of all the hardships he had endured as a result of his people's wickedness, still loved them dearly and only wished for God's favor upon them.

As believers, it is essential for us to have a healthy and active prayer life in order to stand against the wiles of the Devil as we live in this fallen world. The book of James tells us that the prayers of a righteous man are powerful and effective (**James 5:16**). Daniel was indeed a righteous man, so it stands to reason that we could learn a great deal about how WE should pray from his example. Upon closely examining the prayer of Daniel given to us in this text, we will find three important elements of an effective prayer life. Praying in the Word of God, Praying in the Will of God, and Praying in the Worship of God.

Praying in the Word of God

Daniel was studying the scrolls of Jeremiah which contained the detailed promises that God had given regarding the seventy years of Babylonian captivity, and the subsequent return of the Jews to their homeland upon its completion. We, as students of scripture, can still read these promises today in **Jeremiah 29:10-14**:

"This is what the Lord says: "When the seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and I will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

After studying and meditating upon this message given in the word of God, Daniel begins to pray, according to this prophecy. He believed without a doubt that God would fulfill His promises concerning the nation of Israel, and therefore aligned his petition of prayer with the very things that God has already said that He would do. Daniel obeyed the word by seeking God with all his heart, just as God instructed in **verse 13** of Jeremiah's passage. He fasted, and repented in sackcloth and ashes. The original Hebrew text given in **Dan. 9:3** translated, **"So I turned to the Lord God..."** actually should read, **"I set my face to the Lord God..."**. This is most likely a reference to Daniel's customary practice of facing toward Jerusalem as he prayed (**Dan. 6:10**), for the time had come for God to fulfill the longing of Daniel's every waking moment spent in captivity. It was time for Jerusalem to shine again! The Word of God had foretold it, and finally the time was at hand. Daniel knew how to pray because he knew how the Word was leading him to pray.

Many Christians today would be wise to learn the discipline of praying according to the Word of God. Without becoming a student of scripture it is impossible for us to know how to pray. The Word guides us in all things true and spiritual. As we study the Word of God we are shown by The Holy Spirit, the things that we should ask for. **Psalms 37:4** says, **"Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart"**. Many "so called" Bible teachers have taken verses like this out of context and teach impressionable young believers that if they love Jesus, He will give them everything they ask for, no matter how selfish the request. This is a perversion of scripture however, for many who have loved God the most have suffered greatly for His glory. In fact, Daniel himself is a perfect example of someone who was taken against his will to a dark place where he could "shine" for God. To **"delight yourself in the Lord"** simply means to love God so much that you desire His will above your own, and His will can only be discerned through the study of His Holy Scriptures. We learn His will and delight ourselves in it, and subsequently align our actions and our prayers in a manner that coincides with its fulfillment. In short, we read what God wants, we then adjust our desires in order to want what God wants, then we PRAY for what God wants. James says that the reason our prayers go unanswered is because we pray with selfish motives (**James 4:1-3**). When we begin to pray in the Word, we will naturally desire the will of God above our own. Apart from the Word, we are unable to discern the will of God, and therefore our prayers become empty and unproductive. Daniel diligently studied the scrolls of Jeremiah in order to know how to pray. He prayed according to the Word. We must therefore learn a valuable truth from Daniel's prayer; if we want to pray the powerful and effective prayer of a righteous man, we must first dust off our Bibles and hide the Word of God in our hearts. Because Daniel knew and trusted what he had been given in God's word, he was soon to be given even more revelation in answer to his righteous prayers.

Praying in the Will of God

Daniel was certain that it was the will of God to allow the exiles to return home. He had read the prophecies and counted the years. It would have been useless before now to beseech the Lord to allow His people to go free, but now the time had come to pray in earnest. As we have studied previously, knowing the Word of God gives us insight into the will of God. When we pray in the will of God, the answer will always be yes!

When Jesus spoke of prayer, His disciples would always listen eagerly hoping that somehow they could attain just a fraction of His righteous praying power. On one occasion they even asked Him to teach them to pray (**Luke 11:1-13**). They had observed him praying countless times before, and each and every time they had seen the very hand of God working out an answer in the affirmative. Jesus was NEVER refused in a prayer request, not even once. The disciples wanted to know how they could pray with this kind of authority. Jesus began by giving them an example, a "model" prayer, as it were. We know it today as the Lord's prayer.

**... "Our Father, in heaven, hallowed be Your name,
Your kingdom come, Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven,
Give us today, our daily bread,
Forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors,
And Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil one." (Matt. 6:9b-13)**

Notice what Jesus says about the will of the Father? He teaches them that we should long to see the will of God done upon the earth with the same accuracy that it occurs in heaven. Think about that for a moment. Just how often do you think that Almighty God gets His way in heaven? The answer: one hundred percent (100%) of the time!

In heaven, no one ever says no to God. Jesus told his disciples that if they want to have effective prayer lives, they must first align their own will with the will of God. Jesus and His Father were one (**John 10:30**), therefore, everything that the Father wanted, Jesus wanted as well. The lesson here for us all is simple. The more we are at one with Jesus, the more we will pray for what Jesus wants. When we pray for what Jesus wants, the answer is ALWAYS yes. This is what He meant when He tells His disciples in **John 15:7** that if they "remain" in Him, that He would give them everything that they asked for in His name. He had already explained to them a few sentences earlier in **John 15:3**, that the way to "remain" in Him was through His Word, and by remaining in Him they would be effective (**fruitful vs. 4-5**). Does this teaching sound familiar? It is a mirror image of what we read earlier in **Psalms 37:4**, "**Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.**"

As followers of Christ we are commanded to pray in the will of Christ. We find the will of Christ, by studying the Word of Christ. To pray in Jesus name does not mean we ask for whatever greedy desire that we might have, always remembering to end our self serving request with the phrase, "in Jesus' name, amen!". This ridiculous ideology is tantamount to blasphemy. It is a foolish notion to think that we in our mortal, evil, humanity, can somehow "conjure" The Almighty to do our bidding just by saying the "magic" words "in Jesus name". God does not work for us. HE IS SOVEREIGN. WE work for HIM. The more we follow His leading, the more like Him we become, and THAT allows our praying to truly be in Jesus' name.

If we are to be ambassadors for Christ in this fallen world, we need to be doing His will, on His behalf. Or as Henry Blackaby so wonderfully explains in his study, "Experiencing God", to do the will of God, we must look to see where God is already working, and then join with Him in that work. In other words, God already has a plan. It is not our obligation to inform Him of our plans, it is rather our obligation to find out His plan and get in on it.

Before I became a full time minister I used to work as a loan officer for a rather large bank. I was given the authority to lend literally millions of dollars of the bank's money to various clientele. Of course I didn't have that kind of money in my personal accounts, but I was entrusted with the vast sums of monies belonging to the bank. The sole reason the bank was willing to give me the authority to lend such large amounts on its behalf was that I had been thoroughly trained in the bank's policies and procedures for lending out its money. In short, I knew the will of the bank like I knew the back of my hand, and therefore

I was empowered to do business on the bank's behalf. The point that I am attempting to make is this; to be an effective representative of the vast power, and authority of Almighty God, we too must familiarize ourselves with HIS policies and procedures. These policies and procedures can be found in His holy Word. To know Him is to know and trust His Word. To make our requests of Him based upon His Word, **is** to pray in His will.

In the first year of King Darius the Mede, an aged prophet donned a tunic made of sackcloth and began to earnestly pray. For seventy long years, he had dedicated his very soul to the "policies and procedures" of the God whom he had so faithfully served. The moment Daniel fell to his knees and set his face toward Jerusalem, the once beautiful city of God, every word of his heartfelt petition was received by the anxiously awaiting ear of The Sovereign Lord of the universe. The host of heaven fell silent as Daniel, now a mere shadow of the vigorous youth who was led to Babylon in chains so long ago, offered up his petition to God. Never once in all those years, had he denied his God. This wise old man who had stood before the kings of men to give them counsel, began to plead his case before the throne above all thrones: **"O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant of love with all who love Him and obey His commands, we have sinned, and done wrong." (Dan. 9:4)**. Prompted by the sacred word of God, Daniel prayed. His prayer was perfectly aligned with the will of God and the answer from heaven, was already on its way!

Praying in Worship

Our word "worship" comes from a much older English word, *worthship*. It means to ascribe worth, to give credit where it is due. In other words, it is to formally recognize the superiority of another. This word was used to address judges and kings in the old English vernacular. The Hebrew word for worship used many times in the old testament is "Barak", which means to bow down or to get on your knees before God. Even the new testament Greek has a word for worship, *Proskuneo* which literally means to kneel and kiss the feet of someone of worth. Many times I think that believers today have an incomplete idea of what it truly means to worship. Worship is not merely singing a song that says good things about God. Worship in its truest form is the humbling of ones self before Him. Any action that causes us to value the Lord as we devalue ourselves is an act of worship. We should live for Him in that way, praise Him in that way, and PRAY to Him in that way. After Daniel has searched the Word to find the will of God, he began to pray according to that will, and he did so in a spirit of contrite humility. Humility is always a forerunner to a right relationship with God. Daniel did not get on his knees to demand a response from The Almighty. Instead, he humbled himself before Him and asked for His mercy. Daniel did not even request this favor for himself, but humbly asked on behalf of his people. The mark of a great man is not what he gains for himself, but instead, what he is able to obtain for the good of his fellow man. The apostle Paul said that he would rather himself be accursed if he could but save Israel (**Romans 9:3**). Moses told the Lord that he would rather die himself than see the nation of Israel perish (**Exodus 32:31-32**). Daniel also had this kind of heart. He humbled himself in sackcloth and ashes, and prayed in earnest for God's mercy upon the people of Israel.

Daniel began by saying that he made his "confession" before the Lord (**vs.4**). The Hebrew word for confession is "*yadah*", meaning to throw something away from yourself, much like you would throw a stone. Think about that for a moment, confession is not merely admitting you have sin, it is admitting to the sin, and then throwing the sin away. That is the true meaning of repentance, to agree with God that what you have been doing is wrong, and then to stop doing it! Just being sorry won't get it done, we must be sorry enough to throw our sins away. As a minister I often hear the phrase, "I am struggling with this particular sin, I keep confessing it, but I end up doing it over and over again." Could it be that somewhere deep down we have sins that we are unwilling to throw away? For example; when we act in accordance with our own selfish desires and are convicted by the Holy Spirit rather than discarding the sin as an offense to God, we often tie a "string" around it before we throw it away. Because in our hearts we are unwilling to part with the sin. Instead of ridding ourselves of something which is vile and detrimental, we create for ourselves a "sin yo-yo". No matter how hard we try to throw it away, it comes back to us. My advice: CUT THE STRING, if you want to be truly free! No matter what our struggles are, whether it be worry, greed, lust, or pride (the list is endless), we must come to a place where we truly humble ourselves before God and agree with Him that what we are doing is wrong, and then ask Him for His power to help

us throw the sin away...far away. When Daniel made his confession before the Lord, he took ownership of the sins of his nation. He didn't try to explain them away, he did not try to excuse them. He simply admitted that he, along with all his people, from the greatest to the least, (**vs. 8**) were guilty. The time had come to admit to the wickedness and throw it away.

Daniel used several different words to describe the sins for which he and his people were guilty. **"We have sinned"** (Chattah in the Hebrew) means that they had "missed the mark". It is a word used for an archer who shoots his arrow and misses his target. In other words, the people had not lived up to the standards that God had set for them in His word. **"We have done wrong"** (Avah), meaning we have been "twisted" or crooked in our dealings. **"We have been wicked"** (Rasha). **"We have rebelled"** (Marad), and **"We have 'turned away'"** (cuwr), from Your commands and laws.

Daniel went on, not only to humbly admit the sins of his nation, but also to accept the punishment for those sins as just and righteous (**vs.7:16**). He did not argue that God had punished them unfairly. He simply agreed that God is just, and had merely kept the promises He had given to Moses as to what He would do if the people rebelled against Him. These warnings can be found in **Deuteronomy 28:63-68**.

After Daniel had humbly admitted to the sins of his people, and humbly accepted God's punishment of them, he made his request known before the throne of heaven. **"Now, our God, hear the prayers of your servant. For Your sake O Lord, look with favor on Your desolate sanctuary" (vs. 17)**. Daniel did not offer an appeal to God based on the merits of his people, he instead offered his appeal based upon the merits of God! He asked God to restore the people and the great city that bore His name (**vs. 18-19**). He did not appeal to God's sense of righteousness, for they had already witnessed that in light of the past seventy years of bondage. He instead appealed to the Lord for His mercy. The people had already been given what they had deserved, now Daniel prayed for something that they did not deserve. Namely the grace and forgiveness of God. His heartfelt request was that God would forgive the sin, restore His people, and allow Jerusalem to return to its former glory as the city of the living God. Daniel concluded his prayer in the worship of God's "Great Name". It is a wonderful prayer of confession and repentance. It is a prayer prayed in the Word of God, The Will of God, and The Worship of God. We would do well to remember this formula for righteous prayer.

And all God's people said... Amen!