

Daniel's Prayer

Bible Background • DANIEL 9:3–19

Printed Text • DANIEL 9:4B–14 | Devotional Reading • JAMES 5:13–18

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: RECOGNIZE human sinfulness; TRUST that God forgives us of our sins; and CALL on God in times of great distress.

In Focus

Tamika was the only one not surprised that she wound up in jail. While everyone else remembered the Bible-toting, Scripture-quoting person she used to be, she remembered the day her faith changed. It was two years ago when foreclosure took the house she had prayed to God for.

It became reality that she could not afford her home after she was laid off. Instead of getting a job, she chose to start a business and believe God for the prosperity her pastor preached about. As her business grew, so did its expenses, and Tamika was barely able to pocket enough money for gas and groceries. It seemed her telephone, electricity, and water services took turns getting disconnected. The day her house was taken away, Tamika vowed that it was the last thing she would ever lose. She poured her heart and soul into her business and found ways to make it grow faster and bigger—illegally. Surprisingly, the day the police came to arrest her for filing fraudulent claims, she was relieved.

When things go wrong, we tend to run from God instead of going to Him. In today's lesson, we will see Daniel go to God on behalf of the people.

Keep In Mind

“To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him”
(Daniel 9:9, KJV)

Words You Should Know

- A. Trespass** (Daniel 9:7) ma'al (Heb.)—To commit an unfaithful or treacherous act.
- B. Transgress** (v. 11) `abar (Heb.)—To go away or depart from the truth or way.

Say It Correctly

Yehovah. yeh-HO-vah

Elohiym. el-o-HEEM

KJV

Daniel 9:4 And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments;

5 We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments:

6 Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

7 O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee.

8 O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee.

9 To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him;

10 Neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

11 Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him.

12 And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem.

13 As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth.

14 Therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice.

NLT

Daniel 9:4 I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: "O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant and keep your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and obey your commands.

5 But we have sinned and done wrong. We have rebelled against you and scorned your commands and regulations.

6 We have refused to listen to your servants the prophets, who spoke on your authority to our kings and princes and ancestors and to all the people of the land.

7 "Lord, you are in the right; but as you see, our faces are covered with shame. This is true of all of us, including the people of Judah and Jerusalem and all Israel, scattered near and far, wherever you have driven us because of our disloyalty to you.

8 O Lord, we and our kings, princes, and ancestors are covered with shame because we have sinned against you.

9 But the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him.

10 We have not obeyed the Lord our God, for we have not followed the instructions he gave us through his servants the prophets.

11 All Israel has disobeyed your instruction and turned away, refusing to listen to your voice. "So now the solemn curses and judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured down on us because of our sin.

12 You have kept your word and done to us and our rulers exactly as you warned. Never has there been such a disaster as happened in Jerusalem.

13 Every curse written against us in the Law of Moses has come true. Yet we have refused to seek mercy from the Lord our God by turning from our sins and recognizing his truth.

14 Therefore, the Lord has brought upon us the disaster he prepared. The Lord our God was right to do all of these things, for we did not obey him.

The People, Places, and Times

Captivity of the Jews. At the time of our text, the Jews were still being held captive by the Babylonians. Based on Jeremiah's prophecy, Daniel wrote that he understood the expiration of their captivity was at hand. Jeremiah had prophesied that after 70 years of Babylonian captivity, God

would release the Jews. “For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place” (Jeremiah 29:10). In our lesson text, Daniel prays for God to remember to make good on His promise of deliverance.

Background

Long before the prophets, when kings ruled Jerusalem, the Lord swore judgment upon His people for their wickedness. Manasseh, the son of King Hezekiah and king of Judah, was the most wicked of all. He reigned longer than any other king in Judah’s history—55 years of mixing faith in the Lord with idolatrous practices, placing heathen altars and images in the temple, and sacrificing his own sons as burnt offerings to a pagan god (2 Chronicles 33:2–9). His son, Amon, reigned after him and did no better. But his grandson, Josiah, followed the Lord (2 Kings 22:1–7) and restored the temple. Even as Josiah’s repairs were being made, the Lord reiterated His intentions to allow Judah’s captivity.

God’s judgment came to pass during the prophet Jeremiah’s reign. The Babylonians attacked Jerusalem three times, finally destroying the city in 587 B.C. Throughout the attacks, Jeremiah continued to warn his people to turn back to God, give up their idols, and to halt their alliances with foreign countries, but they ignored him. The people did not believe God would let them be captured by foreigners, and they did not think their temple would ever be destroyed. They thought their covenant with God warranted them special protection, even though they did not honor it.

During Jerusalem’s siege, in 605 B.C., Daniel was deported to Babylon as a child. There he was placed in a reeducation program to prepare him for service in the very government that destroyed Jerusalem. Eventually, he became the most powerful Jew of the exile. Because he knew the prophecy of Jeremiah, he knew the 70 years of captivity were up. In our lesson text, we find him praying for God to make good on His promise to deliver the Jews.

At-A-Glance

1. A Prayer of Confession (Daniel 9:4b–8)
2. A Prayer of Repentance (vv. 9–14)

In Depth

1. A Prayer of Confession (Daniel 9:4b–8)

Daniel’s response to Jeremiah’s prophecy is interesting. Instead of concerning himself with the dates of expiration for Jerusalem’s captivity, he was more concerned about the hearts of the people, and he repented for them. He could have taken Jeremiah’s prophecy to King Darius and told him to let them go. Or he could have simply waited, knowing they would go home soon. He simply remembered why they were captured in the first place and went to God on behalf of his people. Instead of focusing on when they would go home, he asked God if they were ready to go.

“O Lord, the great and dreadful God” does not sound like the words of a bitter man (Daniel 9:4b). Anybody else who was stripped from his royal home, thrown in a lions’ den, and shown disturbing visions might be angry with God. But Daniel worshiped Him and acknowledged God for keeping His covenant with them, even when they departed from it.

Daniel was not general in his confession as some are who say, “Forgive me for what I did” or “Lord, you know my heart.” Daniel specifically said, “We sinned and rebelled, we departed from thy precepts and judgments, and we did not hearken unto thy prophets” (v. 5, paraphrased). Then, he gave honor to

whom it was due, “To you belongs righteousness, and to us belongs confusion.” In other words, he said, “You were right, God, and we were wrong.”

2. A Prayer of Repentance (vv. 9–14)

Notice the transition in viewpoint in chapter 9. In verses 2–4, Daniel is writing in the first person point of view (“I Daniel understood ...” [v. 2]; “I set my face ...” [v. 3]; and “I prayed ...” [v. 4a]). Verses 4b-8 show that Daniel has shifted to a more formal viewpoint (for example, “O LORD, righteousness belongeth unto thee”, [v.7]). Here, he has used a second-person point of view that has a more direct, intimate frame of reference (for example, “We have rebelled against him,” v. 9). The chapter’s first set of verses contains Daniel’s confessions; the second set contains his standing as a representative of the people; the third set of verses indicates his willingness to join with the people in their prayers and praise of God. Perhaps we can learn from Daniel by allowing our confessions to have this combination of the personal, reverential, direct, and congregational.

The more we edify and exalt God, the smaller we should become. Our needs, desires, dreams, and thoughts should seem insignificant in the presence of a Holy God as we affirm our desire to repent. In verses 10–12, Daniel focuses on God’s faithfulness to the laws He set before them through Moses. The law records the blessings of obedience and the consequences for disobedience (see Isaiah 1:2–4). Daniel acknowledges God’s faithfulness for punishing Jerusalem for their disobedience according to the law (Daniel 9:13–14). In verse 13, Daniel offers a three-step process for repentance: pray, turn from iniquity, and seek to understand God’s truth.

Search the Scriptures

1. What sins did Daniel confess (Daniel 9:5–6, 9)?
2. What belongs to the Lord (vv. 7, 9)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Based on Daniel’s prayer, the Lord was very merciful to His people. Define mercy and use the Scripture text to identify how the Lord extended mercy to His people.

Liberating Lesson

We take God’s kindness for weakness. When we mess up, we expect immediate consequences. If punishment doesn’t come quickly, then we act like we’ve pulled one over on God. Many of us continue sinning, as though God is OK with our actions. How can we use today’s lesson to teach those in our society who are stubborn, ignorant, or hardheaded that God sees all we do, and He will judge us according to our deeds?

Application for Activation

How often do you confess your sins when you pray? Challenge yourself to pray using the ACTS acronym. The A stands for “adoration.” Begin your prayer as Daniel did—adoring God for who He is and what He’s done. C is for “confession.” Specifically, confess sins of commission (things you did) and omission (things you were supposed to do and didn’t). The T is for “thanksgiving.” Thank God for His mercy, forgiveness, and all He’s done and doing in your life. Finally, the S is for “supplication,” meaning make your requests known to God.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Daniel 9:4b–14

Introduction:

The date is clear from verse 1, the first year of “Darius the Mede,” who some historians say was an intermediary ruler over the Babylonian Kingdom until the Persian conqueror, Cyrus, overtook the region in 538 BCE. In verse 2, Daniel foresees 70 weeks of desolation for Jerusalem, so he turns to God in prayer as he realizes that the time of the 70 years is drawing to a close. This is the prayer of a true disciple. Daniel is a man of integrity whose life revolves around God and His Word. Even the Babylonians recognized Daniel’s impeccable character when those closest to the king convinced Darius to throw Daniel to the lions (6:6–24).

Daniel’s prayer affirmed and endorsed the prophet Jeremiah’s words about 70 years of captivity for Israel (Jeremiah 25:11–12; 29:10). The length of the exile is also confirmed in 2 Chronicles 36:20–21: “Daniel recognized that Jeremiah’s writings were inspired by God and therefore inherently trustworthy and dependable” (Daniel—Minor Prophets, 107). When the Persians overtook the Babylonians, Daniel knew that the period of captivity in which he had spent most of his life was nearly over. In the 7th century, the prophet Isaiah had foretold these events in a rare type of prophecy that named Cyrus as the one who would release the captives so they could rebuild Jerusalem (see Isaiah 44:28; 45:1–2, 4, 13). Daniel recalled covenant promises and affirmations given to both Isaiah and Jeremiah in his prayer for God to release Israel as had been foretold.

4b O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments;

In verse 3, Daniel writes, “I set my face unto the Lord God,” which versions such as ESV translate as “I turned my face”—a clear allusion to the Middle Eastern practice, still in effect, of turning toward Jerusalem to pray. Much Jewish and Christian architecture as well positioned the holiest part of their churches and synagogues facing toward Jerusalem. The first half of verse 4, which reads, “And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession,” sets the tone for the whole prayer. This passage has been called “Daniel’s Great Prayer” and a “great prose prayer of penitence” (Daniel, 128). Similar prayers can be found in Ezra 9:6–15 and Nehemiah 1:5–11—two examples among dozens in the Old Testament.

Also in Daniel 9:3, he had prepared himself for such a solemn prayer by fasting, mourning, and wearing sackcloth. He knew his prayer would not be based on Israel’s merit, for their exile was a righteous judgment of their having utterly forsaken God. In today’s language, one would say someone

had worked very hard to earn such a harsh sentence, and deserved every bit of it and more. Israel's sins had included unrepentant idolatry, immorality, and martyrdom of prophets. Daniel knew that Israel's hope lay only in the mercy and grace of God, as he saw implicit in Isaiah and Jeremiah's prophecies.

The prayer starts with a common reference to "Lord" (Heb. yhovah, yeh-ho-VAW or ya-VAY, depending on the Hebrew vowel points), which is God's proper name used more than 6,000 times in the Old Testament. Daniel also invokes the less common reference of "God" (Heb. 'elohiym, el-o-HEEM), a plural masculine noun cited about 2,600 times in the Old Testament, which is used here and four more times in the studied portion (9:8, 10, 13, 14). Having clearly addressed the God of Israel and none other, Daniel further frames his salutation here by referencing God's transcendence ("great and dreadful God") as well as His grace ("keeping the covenant of mercy"). In so doing, he acknowledges God's unchanging, righteous character. Like a loving parent, God does not change His love for His children even when forced to discipline them. The implication, which the rest of the prayer makes clear, is that Daniel recognizes God has not acted unjustly by punishing Israel and that the people fully deserved their bitter exile.

5 We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments:

6 Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

As the people's representative, Daniel includes himself in the confession, which also has been called a model prayer of penitence (compare with similar words in Solomon's prayer dedicating the temple in 1 Kings 8:47). His dual reference to Israel's sin matches the prior dual reference to God in the salutation and acknowledgment of two aspects of God's character, which again is framed with a double reference to precepts and judgments. In Daniel 9:5, Israel's sin is both "iniquity" (Heb. `avah, a-VAW), which can be translated perverse or perversion (see Proverbs 12:8; Jeremiah 3:21), and "wickedness" (Heb. rasha`, raw-SHAH), which also translates and infers guilt or condemnation (see Job 10:2, "Do not condemn me"; and Psalm 94:21, "condemn the innocent blood"). These great sins violated both "precepts" (Heb. mitsvah, mits-VAW), which can mean commandments, and "judgments" (Heb. mishpat, mish-PAWT), both referring to God's laws or prohibitions.

Daniel fully professes that Israel had ignored both God and His prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. Even the small remnant of faithful believers was not sufficient to ward off God's judgment. In short, the entire nation had no legs on which to stand for an appeal, such as is often the case today, where occasionally new evidence or new science surfaces and justifies a new trial. God's wrath is without blame; both God's law and His will are righteous and in harmony: "The Lord is in all these things righteous. These disasters, as well as the imminent restoration, are fruits of his righteousness" (Daniel, 137).

7 O LORD, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee.

8 O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee.

There is a chiasmic, poetic quality to this part of the prayer, which repeats the first thought in the next verse, and repeats the "confusion of faces" idea. In Hebrew, this is expressed with a single word

bosheth (BO-sheth), which means “shame.” The polarized contrast could not be more complete: righteousness for God and shame for the Israelites. Israel’s former respect had turned to derision (disdain, scorn, mockery); their former glory had been decimated. All they once had was now lost—they had lost their nation, the land God had given them by promise to their forefathers, and they had even lost their freedom and dignity. A popular saying calls for losers to “pay the piper,” but the biblical version is “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

9 To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him;

While the Hebrew for the word “mercies” is a fairly common word racham (RAKH-am), the Hebrew word Daniel selected for “forgivenesses” in this verse is c@lyichah (sel-EE-khaw), which can mean “pardon”, and it is used only three times in the Old Testament (see Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 130:4).

In one sentence, Daniel 9:9 captures the timeless problem of humanity since the Fall. People sin, then repent at some point, and God in His mercy forgives—then the cycle repeats again, over and over, generation after generation, century after century. No matter how faithless people are, God remains true to Himself and is continuously faithful. No matter how utterly sinful people are, God’s commitment to mercy and forgiveness for those who repent is everlasting. This verse captures God’s nature, His relationship with His people, and is a snapshot of the Gospel.

10 Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

Their sins were undeniable and egregious. By flagrantly disobeying God and rejecting Him, they rejected the very mercy and grace which they so desperately needed and the benefits of God’s covenant too. Among the many benefits they abandoned when they turned their backs on God were His many promises, such as protection if they remained faithful, an abundance of provision, and the respect of other nations (see Deuteronomy 28:7–10). This chapter is a “meditation of Scripture upon earlier Scripture” (Daniel, 129). Readers of Daniel 9, particularly verse 10, will notice that its words and phrases are almost entirely found elsewhere in the Old Testament.

11 Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him.

They were without excuse or defense. Daniel’s humility was accurate, for Israel’s sins were monumental. In truth, it is hard to imagine how they might have committed even more serious crimes against God—that He allowed the entire nation to be taken into captivity for what amounted to the lifespan of an average man (70 years) was evidence of the extent of His displeasure with the people called by His name: “the calamity has taken place because God is consistent and faithful to his character as Righteous One” (Daniel, 135).

Being just, God cannot overlook sins of such magnitude without compromising His own character and making all His prior warnings meaningless. What example would Israel then be to the world if they, in essence, could get away with such outrageous behavior? Why would anyone trust in God’s covenantal faithfulness if He didn’t keep His promises of blessing and curses? No other people would have any reason whatsoever to repent or follow God, much less obey His commands and trust in His righteous judgment. In a real sense, “all this served to vindicate the holiness and righteousness of God and to demonstrate to all the world the sanctity of his moral law” (Daniel—Minor Prophets, 110).

12 And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem.

13 As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth.

14 Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice.

Daniel's only recourse was to do exactly what he was doing, which was to throw the nation of Israel on the mercy of God's court of justice (compare with Moses' prayers after Israel's idolatry with the golden calf in Exodus 32:11, 31–32). Daniel appealed to God for the future of his people, his city, and his nation. Who would speak of God; who would believe on Him if Israel were utterly destroyed and her city forgotten? This would be the greatest tragedy of all in Daniel's mind, as all the pagans from then on would believe their gods had prevailed, that the God of the Israelites was weak because He couldn't even salvage His own people or protect His own temple. Thus, Daniel leaned on the prophesied promises of restoration and pardon. As proof of Daniel's pure heart, God heard his prayer and responded through the angel Gabriel in the verses to come that their redemption already had been decreed (Daniel 9:20–27).

Verses 5–8 are part of Daniel's prayer of repentance as he makes a transition from the first person to the second person point of view, and he counts himself as one of Israel's sinners; verses 9–14 are cast as though he were preaching a sermon testifying of God's greatness and has joined with a congregation in praising God and remaining faithful. Together, the verses are a statement of understanding the experience of exile as a punishment orchestrated by a righteous God. There is a cause- and-effect relationship between covenant disobedience and judgment. At the same time, the prayer is a testimony of faith that in spite of the present circumstances, Daniel still has hope and faith in God's mercy. This classic prayer is an "example of the interim posture of the saint who can through prayer glorify God even as God points beyond the dark confines of the present era of tragedy to the bright age of reversal and renewal which lies ahead" (Daniel, 129).

God's dependable, steadfast love and mercy were well known (see Exodus 34:6–7; Deuteronomy 7:9, 12; 1 Kings 8:23). Just as Solomon prayed with faith in God's mercy, so Daniel held out hope for God to hear and forgive (compare with 1 Kings 8:49–50). Likewise, regardless of the seemingly hopeless condition of the modern world, every believer can repeat the prayers of the saints of yesteryear, such as Daniel, who knew that no matter how bad things looked, faith and hope in God are always well placed and eventually will be rewarded. When all of this is cast as future, apocalyptic events, the historical principles become magnified but remain consistent—it is only through repentance that redemption comes, and this is because of God's perfect righteousness. Then, as now, "God is called upon to glorify himself by saving a people in dire need" (Daniel, 138).

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Daniel's Resolve
(Daniel 1:8-15)

TUESDAY

Daniel's Recognition
(Daniel 1:16-21)

WEDNESDAY

The King's Challenge
(Daniel 2:1-11)

THURSDAY

Daniel's Intervention
(Daniel 2:12-16)

FRIDAY

Daniel's Success
(Daniel 2:36-49)

SATURDAY

Daniel's Prayer of Supplication
(Daniel 9:15-19)

SUNDAY

Daniel's Prayer of Confession
(Daniel 9:4b-14)