

“And I [Daniel] Prayed”

Daniel 9:1-21

Although this chapter ends in Daniel’s third vision (the one vision of Daniel that gets the most attention by prophecy preachers), the majority of content of this chapter is given to prayer.

Verse one gives the background and timetable of when this prayer, and subsequent vision, occurred. Much debate has been given on who the “Darius the son of Ahasuerus” was. Those that want to find fault with the authorship of the book as being Daniel, as stated, will say this ruler either never existed or ruled long after Daniel would have died. Of course, neither one of those are accurate if a true acceptance of Scripture is made along with an honest study of history in accordance with what the book says.

Brief background as found in John Gill’s commentary:

This is the same with Darius the Median, that took the kingdom after the death of Belshazzar; so called, to distinguish him from Darius the Persian; and yet Porphyry has the gall to assert that this was Darius the Persian, under whom the temple was built, that Daniel might appear to live later than he did: Ahasuerus, whose son he was, is not he that was the husband of Esther, and was many years later than this; but the same with Astyages king of the Medes, and who is called Ahasuerus, in the Apocrypha:

"But before he died he heard of the destruction of Nineve, which was taken by Nabuchodonosor and Assuerus: and before his death he rejoiced over Nineve." (Tobit 14:15)

the father of Cyaxares, the same with this Darius, who was uncle to Cyrus that conquered Babylon, and made him king of it, and of the whole empire; for this was not the first year of his reign over Media, where he had reigned many years before, but over Chaldea, as follows:

which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; by Cyrus his nephew; who having taken Babylon, and settled his affairs, undertook a journey to Persia, and made Media in his way; where he met with his uncle Cyaxares, the same with this Darius, and delivered the kingdom of Babylon to him, and married his daughter, with whom he had for her dowry the kingdom of Media, as Xenophon (y) relates. Now it was in the first year of his reign over the Chaldeans that Daniel had the following vision of the seventy weeks; w

hich, according to Bishop Usher (z) and Mr. Whiston (a), was in the year of the world 3467 A.M. and 537 B.C. Dean Prideaux (b) places it in the year 538; and Mr. Bedford (c) in the year 536.

(y) Cyropaedia, l. 8. c. 36. (z) Annales Vet. Test. A. M. 3467. (a) Chronological Tables, cent. 10. (b) Connexion, &c. part 1. p. 125, 128. (c) Scripture Chronology, p. 711.

Daniel, based on that timetable, would be about 80 years old at this point. He had served for many years under three rulers and had proved himself faithful. In all those years, Daniel had developed and maintained an avid, purposeful prayer life. It was this prayer life that got Daniel thrown into the lion's den, as recorded in chapter six. Although it cannot be determined with absolute confidence, it is most likely that this chapter, and the events it describes, took place around the same time as the lion's den episode. In fact, it would be safe to speculate that it

may have been this very prayer that caused the events that led to the Daniel in the lion's den.

When it was that Daniel had this communion with God (Dan. 9:1), in the first year of Darius the Mede, who was newly made king of the Chaldeans, Babylon being conquered by him and his nephew, or grandson, Cyrus. In this year the seventy years of the Jews' captivity ended, but the decree for their release was not yet issued out; so that this address of Daniel's to God seems to have been ready in that year, and, probably, before he was cast into the lions' den. And one powerful inducement, perhaps, it was to him then to keep so close to the duty of prayer, though it cost him his life, that he had so lately experienced the benefit and comfort of it. (Matthew Henry)

Dr. Walvoord makes a good observation:

[T]he events of Belshazzar's feast in chapter 5 occurred between the visions of chapters 8 and 9. It is not clear where chapter 6 fits into this order of events, but it also may well have occurred in the first year of the reign of Darius, either immediately before or immediately after the events of chapter 9.

So, how does all that fit? What does it matter? It lays the framework for one of the greatest prayers recorded in the Bible – one of the best illustrations for prayer for a people, for a nation, and, more applicably today, for a church. Before we get to the contents of the actual prayer itself, there are couple things to note.

I. READING THE BIBLE (WITH THE PURPOSE OF LEARNING) WILL PRODUCE PRAYER – VS. 2

A. Reading the Bible will produce an

urgency for prayer – there will be specificity and deliberateness to it – “In the first year of his reign” (a phrase repeated from verse one, which indicates the peculiar dynamics of the prayer)

1. It is not abundantly clear as to whether Daniel was looking for something in particular in his study, or if he was just making a study of what they then had for Scripture and came across this prophecy. Either way, the outcome was the same.
2. In this first year of the reign of Darius, there would have been another upheaval in both the government and the country and Daniel, as an old man (by standards of the day) realized he wouldn't be alive long into this reign and it was likely he was searching in the writings (particularly of Jeremiah, having known of him, if not had known him personally as a youth) for something he could secure his hope upon as he faced this somewhat chaotic time.
3. A connection between the Word of God and prayer is common throughout the Old Testament, especially in the poetical books. Many of those connections produce praise and glory for who God is and are not commonly found to be penitential in nature. The outcome of this Bible study that Daniel appears to undertake produced a penitential prayer. It was a clear understanding of Scripture that produced this prayer.

B. Reading the Bible with a purpose will

produce understanding – “I Daniel understood by books the number of the years...”

1. “Understood”

- a) The Hebrew word used here (יָדַע) is one that means to discern, to perceive, to observe, to pay attention to. It is translated in a literal sense in one Hebrew-English interlinear Bible as the word “meditated.”
- b) The Greek translation in the Septuagint uses a Greek word (συνίημι) that comes from two words that literally mean to put together. Spiros Zodhiates explains this word: “The comprehending activity of the mind denoted by suniēmi entails the assembling of individual facts into an organized whole, as collecting the pieces of a puzzle and putting them together. The mind grasps concepts and sees the proper relationship between them.
- c) Considering these two words and their definitions, Daniel only understood what he was reading after a careful study and comparison with all the information he had from both his experience, his relationship with the Lord, and the written Word of God to which he had access.

Psalm 119:99–100

99 I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.

100 I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.

2 Timothy 3:15–17

15 And that from a child thou hast known

the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17 That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

1 Peter 1:10-12

10 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you:

11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

- d) Daniel was not technically a scholar of the Scriptures as a scribe would have been. His time, for the most part, was spent in government work as a politician. He had "retired" from that service to some degree by this point and it would seem he was now spending time in the Scriptures. This shows us that one needs not be a theologian to be able to read and understand (comprehend by putting pieces together) the Bible. All one needs to do is read it with a purpose.

Daniel's purpose then produced a prayer for the ages.

2. "By the books" – the Hebrew word for books here (סִפְרִים) is plural and means books, scrolls, documents, letters, etc. Some say that this is the canon of Scripture that is referred to (some translations have it as either sacred scripture or Scripture capitalized, demonstrating this view) but that is not likely. Jeremiah sent the Jews in captivity a letter telling them how long they would be in captivity, and it is this letter that Daniel directly responds to in this verse, and from which he draws his conclusions (Jer. 29). That said, by further reading in Daniel 9 it will be found that he was also reading and meditating on the Mosaic Law (the Torah – תּוֹרָה) along with other writings of the prophets (Jeremiah and Isaiah, for example). This is most likely why the plural form of the word is used. It was this understanding of the entirety of Scripture that he had access to that produced his passionate prayer of confession and for restitution.
3. "The number of the years" – the length that they would be in captivity. Daniel expected there to be a time limit and his visions seemed to enforce the fact that God seemed to always have limits to the judgment of His people.
4. "Whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years"

- a) One thing to note is that this is the only chapter in Daniel (the only time in his writings) that the name of God is used – YAHWEH יהוה. Each other time God is referred to it is with a name that would have been more acceptable (אֱלֹהִים) and understood by both the Chaldeans and the Jews in captivity. It wasn't until Daniel had spent time in the Word of God that he came to this clear picture of who they were in relation to who He was.
- b) Another thing to notice is that Daniel interpreted the seventy years of captivity as literal – an indication from Scripture itself we are to take things literally as well. The Bible wasn't finished yet – not even much of the Old Testament had been produced in a form that would be indicative of Scripture – so all Daniel (and Jeremiah, for that matter) had to do was take God at His word. Why can't we do that today? The Bible is its best own commentary, after all.
- c) Jeremiah prophesied (recorded twice in his prophecy) that the captivity would last 70 years – and it did. Much has been written on the exactness of this span of years – when it began, when did it end, how it relates to Daniel's prophecy, etc. The point in this message is not to delve into that but simply to state that what Jeremiah prophesied came true in every detail. Jeremiah 25:1-14 and 29:1-17 give the details. Jeremiah 29 is the record of the letter that was sent that seems to be the catalyst Daniel found that sparked this prayer.

Jeremiah 25:10–11

¹⁰ Moreover I will take from them the

voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle.

¹¹ And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

Jeremiah 29:10–14

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

¹² Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you.

¹³ And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

¹⁴ And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.

C. Reading the Bible that produces an understanding will produce an uncommon knowledge of who man is in relation to who the Lord God is (as found in the following text) – “in the desolations of Jerusalem”

1. In understanding the implications of the desolations, and the consequence of the actions that precipitated these events, led Daniel to a very real sense of his sin and a real sense of the greatness and holiness of God.
2. The term “desolations” (הַרְבָּה) is one that means (properly) drought – it implies a decayed place, a place laid waste with no worth. That is what the LORD (through Babylon) did to Jerusalem – He laid it waste with no worth to it. This desolation, even though was not seen personally by Daniel, was nonetheless dramatic enough to him, vivid enough to him (both by the writings of Jeremiah and most likely the first-hand accounts by people Daniel knew that had been there) to have a dramatic influence.
3. If we comprehend the destruction sin brings, the desolation it caused, the worthlessness it creates in one’s life, and we understand that from God’s word, it will change us completely. It will have a profound impact on our prayer life.

Conclusion to the point: The Word of God plays a vital role in our prayer life. If we want the type of prayer life that is spoken of in the Bible, then we are going to need to have a workable understanding of the Bible. A cursory reading when we go to church will not be enough to transform us into what God wants us to be. If we want to know God’s will for our lives and in what we bring to Him in prayer, we are going to have to be students of the Word.

II. PRAYER WILL PRODUCE A RECOGNITION OF SIN AND CONFESSION OF THAT SIN – VS. 3-14

A. Verses 3-4a give us a basic overview of the parts involved in prayer – the pattern and attitude we are to follow, even today.

The first thing Daniel wanted to do was find the Lord's will on the matter of the length of time for the captivity (vs. 2). He knew this was a serious matter and one that he needed the answer for, in part, perhaps, so he could both guide the Jews living in captivity that would make it back to Israel, and to guide the steps of the leaders of the Medio-Persian empire in knowing their place in the return. It was something he needed answers to and knew of only one real way of getting those answers – by finding the Lord's will. So, how did he do that?

1. Commit to the purpose – needing answers – “And I set my face unto the LORD my God”
 - a) “And I set” – comes from a word (נָתַן) that means to give or to place. It is one of the most common verbs in the Old Testament, appearing approximately 2,000 times and it has a wide variety of meaning and application.

(1) The form and function of this particular verb (נָתַן) is only used twelve times in the Old Testament and is translated most of those times as a form of the verb “to give” – eight times. It is translated “set” (two times), “put,” and

"made" (each one time).

(2) *In the context of its usage, the idea behind Daniel setting his face "unto the Lord God" is that he determined to commit his entire attention – body, mind, spirit – to this one particular task of seeking the will of God. The idea behind the term is the finality of the action. To "give" something is to no longer maintain possession. To give the Lord God his "face" was to no longer possess that time and faculty until he had an answer.*

- b) "My face" - Some interpret this as "Then I directed my face to the Lord" (Keil & Delitzsch) – indicating that he looked to Him. This is a very common word and most often it is used in a figurative sense to demonstrate where one's attention is directed, where one's life is headed.

Daniel 10:12

12 Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.

1 Chronicles 22:19

19 Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God; arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the LORD God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and the holy vessels of God, into the house that is to be built to the name of the LORD.

- c) "Unto the Lord God" – Daniel, as he had done his entire life, knew to whom he was

praying.

(1) *The words for "Lord God" here – אֲדֹנָי הָאֱלֹהִים – reference both the authority of God as Lord and Master, as well as the entirety of the godhead itself.*

(2) *It is not the name that is normally associated with the LORD in the Old Testament prophetic books (יְהוָה) but is a more personal, relational name – recognizing His relation to man as God and authoritative with the ability to hear and answer prayers. "The Lord of the whole world, the true God" – K&D.*

(3) *In one sense, this is more demonstrative of the relationship the Lord is seen having with His children in the New Testament – as "Abba, Father."*

Galatians 4:6

⁶ And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

2. Be constrained in activity until the answer comes or clear direction is given – "by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes."

a) The means – "by prayer and supplication"

(1) "Prayer"

(a) This Hebrew word (noun) for "prayer" (תְּפִלָּה) is used 77 times in the Old Testament (which includes the times it is used in the titles of

the Psalms, which are not inspired). There are at least three other words translated “prayer” in the Old Testament but they only account for six of the 83 times the English word “prayer” is used.

(b) The word is the basic word for “prayer” – a word that carries the basic idea of a plea.

(2) *“And supplication” – it is the coupling here of this word with prayer that gives us a better understanding of the term “prayer.”*

(a) The word (תְּהַנִּיחַ) is one that means to ask for favor, to intreat in prayer, earnest prayer. It comes from a primitive root in Hebrew (הָנַח) that means “to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior; to implore (that is, move to favor by petition)” Strong. In its usage in Scripture, it carries the idea of asking for mercy or favor – which is what we do in prayer.

(b) When coupled with prayer, as here, it is one of urgency and deliberate seeking for help. “He does not speak of that ordinary prayer, which he used in his house three times a day, but of a rare and vehement prayer, lest their sins should cause God to delay the time of their deliverance prophesied by Jeremiah.” (Geneva Bible notes)

2 Chronicles 6:24

²⁴ And if thy people Israel be put

to the worse before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee; and shall return and confess thy name, and pray and make supplication before thee in this house;

Job 9:15

¹⁵ Whom, though I were righteous, yet would I not answer, but I would make supplication to my judge.

b) The methods – “with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes”

(1) Fasting is more an Old Testament principle than a New Testament directive but that is not to say we are not to fast today – it is to say that there was a given fast that was part of the Levitical Law that the Israelites under the old covenant were obligated to do on the Day of Atonement. We are not bound by those same laws today, being under grace rather than law. Fasting is not required to be right with God – it is a mechanism available to us if we have an urgent need and want to “set our face unto the Lord God in prayer,” like Daniel did.

(a) The word “fasting” (צוֹם), in its various forms, is used 26 times in the Old Testament – so it can be seen that it wasn’t a very common thing.

(b) The Greek word for “fasting” (νηστεία) is used only eight times – three in the Gospels, twice in Acts, and three times by Paul to the

Corinthians (one in his first letter and twice in his second). So, by the infrequency of its mention in relation to prayer, it is a safe biblical interpretive principle to say it is not required but still effective if led to follow.

- (c) What this teaches us in the church age is the attitude we are to have in prayer – it is to be one of understanding devotion to God rather than of things of pleasure. The use of the fast, in many cases in the Old Testament, was connected with repentance, to show their unworthiness – to seek God’s forgiveness through this means. Under the new covenant, the means of our redemption has already been provided so fasting is no longer required for the purpose it once held.

(2) *"And sackcloth" (or, fasting in sackcloth) – used 49 times in the Old Testament – this was a penitential garment made of hair (K&D). It was coarse, most often made of black goat’s hair, and intentionally made uncomfortable. The word (קִשׁוֹן) literally means sack and was a word use for a sack that held grain, which was most likely what they used as this garment.*

- (a) This was another sign of repentance – again, as with fasting, we don’t need to follow those protocols to enter into the presence of the Father – we have direct access to the throne itself.

- (b) What this shows us is the attitude we are to have – the humbleness of mind and spirit as we approach the presence of our heavenly Father.

Hebrews 4:15-16

¹⁵ For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

(3) *"And ashes"*

- (a) The word used (אַפָּרַיִם) is a noun meaning soil, ashes, or dust (it is used 24 times in the Old Testament). "It describes soil or dirt put on a person's head..." (Zodhiates). It comes from an unused root word that means to "bestrew," to cover or partly cover with scattered objects.

- (b) The word is used, as it is here, coupled with sackcloth, as a symbol of repentance and grief. Again, demonstrating the attitude Daniel had as he approached the Lord God.

"Very simply, sackcloth and ashes were used as an outward sign of one's inward condition. Such a symbol made one's change of heart visible and demonstrated the sincerity of one's grief and/or repentance. It was not the act of

putting on sackcloth and ashes itself that moved God to intervene, but the humility that such an action demonstrated (see 1 Samuel 16:7). God's forgiveness in response to genuine repentance is celebrated by David's words: 'You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy' (Psalm 30:11)." (cited from <https://www.gotquestions.org/sackcloth-and-ashes.html>)

3. Make confession (of sin, and, in context, recognizing who our God is) – vs. 4a – "And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said"

a) The word for "prayed" here (פָּלַל) is verb form similar to the noun "prayer" in verse three. They both have the idea of intercession. "This is the most common Hebrew word used to describe the general act of prayer" (Zodhiates).

b) "Unto the LORD my God" – different than in verse three. Here it is יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי (Yahweh God) rather than אֱלֹהֵי ה' (Lord God). It seems there may have been two parts to Daniel's prayer. Verse three may have been him preparing his heart for the prayer itself he is about to pray, recognizing the closeness of his God to him. Here it seems that in actual prayer, as it is recorded, that with all the demonstration of penance (fasting, sackcloth, and ashes) He addresses the God of Israel, the God that all of the people would have known through the teachings of their past – YAHWEH – "I Am."

c) "And made my confession"

(1) The use of this word (תְּהַלֵּל) doesn't necessarily mean confession of sin as we know it, or as the New Testament uses the word. It simply means to acknowledge, and in many cases, means to praise or give thanks.

(2) The word is used 114 times and of those at least 90 are translated "praise" or "thanks" (in their various forms). "If we wish our prayers to be heard, then God, to whom we pray, must become our God" (K&D). I believe this is the reason for the use of the two different names for "Lord God."

Conclusion to this point: If we want a prayer life that has value and effectiveness then we are going to need to follow example in the Bible. Not only did Jesus give a model prayer in the Sermon on the Mount but He also gave many illustrations of that prayer in practice through Scripture – this text being one of those examples.

There are many pastors, preacher, theologians, teachers, etc. that have given many differing views on prayer. Some notable, influential people of both modern day and historical figures, have been adamant on length of prayer, frequency of prayer, content of prayer, etc. The longest prayer recorded in Scripture (a debatable issue, depending on version, language, etc.) would only take a few minutes to read. The longest prayer recorded that Jesus prayed was in John 17 – again, only taking a few minutes to read. There are prayers referred to in the Bible that lasted all night, or corporate prayers that lasted even days – but those are what are considered outliers, or exceptions. There is no hard and fast rule for prayer – Jesus, when asked how to

pray He simply said, "When ye pray, say..." The point is – just pray.

III. CONFESSION OF SIN WILL ALLOW OUR PRAYER TO BE EFFECTIVE – VS. 15-21