



## FOCUS VERSE

### 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;

## LESSON TEXT

### Daniel 9:1–7, 16–19

1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans;

2 In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

3 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

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.

.....

16 O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us.

17 Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake.

18 O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies.

19 O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.



## FOCUS THOUGHT

In addition to private prayer, the church is blessed by corporate prayer.



# CULTURE CONNECTION

## The Power of Prayer

**T**oo many people believe they lack the influence to change things for the better. In a world seemingly dominated by the 1 percent who control most of the wealth, those in the other 99 percent often feel powerless. Some well-to-do individuals actually have more money than some countries, so it's easy to see why so many people feel that they are weak. But what if the numbers are reversed spiritually? What if believers who are committed to daily prayer have a greater influence on the world than the wealthiest people on the planet?

Even though many Christians do not fully recognize their ability to touch God, non-believers see the great gift Christians possess. They often approach Christians to pray for

them. These individuals may have no desire to pursue a godly lifestyle, but they frequently look for a lifeline in the midst of their storm. Although they are largely out of tune with God, they know enough about the Spirit of the Lord to realize that Christians can pray for healing, deliverance, and blessing.

Perhaps the enemy's greatest weapon against believers is causing them to forget that they possess great power through prayer. In a world where more and more individuals seem to reject the Lord, Christians need to be even more committed to seeking the Almighty through prayer. Many of them may not possess personal wealth, but they enrich others through prayer.

### OUTLINE

- I. DANIEL'S DISCOVERY**
  - A. Babylonian Captivity
  - B. Jeremiah's Prophecy
- II. DANIEL'S DESIRE**
  - A. For Israel's Return to God
  - B. To Be in Harmony with the Will of God
- III. DANIEL PRAYED**
  - A. Identified with God's People
  - B. Confessed the Sins of the People
  - C. Recognized Their Captivity Was a Result of Sin
  - D. Appealed to God's Mercy
  - E. Repented for the People
  - F. Asked God to Return Israel Home So His Name Was Honored
- IV. DANIEL PREVAILED**
  - A. Visitation of Gabriel
  - B. Received Much More Than He Was Seeking

### CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

The Book of Daniel reveals that the faithful cannot only survive in difficult circumstances, but they can also thrive if they remain loyal to the Lord and devote themselves to prayer.

In Daniel 1, Daniel and his friends Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego refused to defile themselves with the king's meat and wine because Babylonians had most likely tainted the food and drink by offering it to idols. The four friends requested to be tested for ten days to prove that their commitment to serving the Lord would not diminish them. God rewarded their faithfulness, and they advanced in their standing in the kingdom.

Their prosperity, however, appeared to be short-lived. In chapter 2, Daniel found himself facing death because none of the wise men of Babylonian could recount Nebuchadnezzar's dream to him and give the interpretation. Stepping out by faith, Daniel asked the king for more time. Once the monarch granted his request, Daniel and his three friends prayed, desiring mercies of the God of Heaven. In spite of their knowledge, they humbled themselves and requested wisdom in the spirit of James 1:5: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." The Lord revealed the secret, Daniel told the king his dream and gave the interpretation, and the king promoted Daniel and his compatriots. The four young Hebrew

men showed that they knew how to seek the favor of both God and humans.

Even when the four friends fell out of political favor, they held fast to their faith in God. In chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar commanded everyone to bow down to the image he constructed. Nevertheless Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood firm in their stance against worshiping idols, defying the king's order. They knew that God had the power to deliver them, but they reconciled themselves to the fact that He might choose not to save them. Their resolve led to a great miracle. God allowed them to be thrown into the fiery furnace, but He did not permit the flames to hurt them in any way. In the end, Nebuchadnezzar made a decree declaring the greatness of the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Another decree by a different king placed Daniel's life at risk. When Daniel's adversaries concocted a scheme that demanded all of King Darius's subjects to pray to him alone or be thrown into the lions' den, Daniel continued his routine of praying to the one true God. His enemies viewed his loyalty to the Lord as a warrant of certain death because the king's law could not be altered. Daniel, however, served a greater King—a mighty Lord who could subvert the very laws of nature. When the king's men threw Daniel into the den of lions, God sent an angel to shut the lions' mouths. The power of prayer triumphed once again. King Darius made a proclamation exalting the God of Daniel.

Daniel and his friends knew how to make requests of kings and of God. They knew how to ask for the right things in the right way. But perhaps other exiles in Babylon did not know how to behave in a strange land. Some of them no doubt bowed to Nebuchadnezzar's image. Others likely prayed to King Darius because they feared the ravaging lions. Therefore Daniel had a burden for his people, and he prayed a corporate prayer for them.

We often think of corporate prayer as a group of people praying together simultaneously. Although that is one definition, corporate prayer can also be defined as one person praying in the stead of an entire group of people. Perhaps Daniel remembered Psalm 145:8: "The LORD is gracious, and full of

compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy." Daniel took it upon himself to assume the sins and other shortcomings of the people in Daniel 9. He confessed the iniquity of the people and prayed that they might be forgiven. Daniel's example of corporate prayer challenges us to pray in the stead of our families, our friends, our churches, and our nations.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

### I. DANIEL'S DISCOVERY

#### A. Babylonian Captivity

In 587 BC, the Babylonians did the unthinkable. They captured the city of Jerusalem and then destroyed the Temple. They took precious objects from the Temple back to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also sought treasure among the human resources of the kingdom of Judah. He searched for valuable individuals among the children of the elite. He desired beautiful young people with wisdom, knowledge, and the ability to learn the language of the Chaldeans.

Daniel and his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego found themselves among this group. The Babylonians stole their homeland and their youth when they deported them to Babylon. The Babylonians changed their names and attempted to acclimate them to Chaldean culture.

The four young men had to pay for crimes they did not commit. During his reign, King Hezekiah of Judah had drawn the attention of the Babylonians when he showed an envoy from their land the riches of his kingdom. Hezekiah's pride led the Babylonians to crave the wealth of Judah. Hezekiah, however, was not alone in placing the people of Judah in the cross hairs of the rising foreign power. Some of the other monarchs in Judah had led the kingdom into idolatry. The people of Judah had sinned against the Lord by worshiping false gods. God determined to punish Judah for its sins. The Babylonians would be a tool in the hands of the Almighty, bringing wrath upon Judah.

#### B. Jeremiah's Prophecy

God, however, showed mercy by limiting the punishment to seventy years. As an exile,

Daniel wanted to know when God would again show loving kindness to His people and end the Babylonian captivity. Daniel began searching the Scriptures. In the Book of Jeremiah, he discovered the Lord's promise of a seventy-year exile.

It was not easy for Jeremiah to make this prophecy. Nevertheless, in spite of great opposition from his king and other prophets, Jeremiah foretold the Babylonian captivity, and their nations declaring, "And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years" (Jeremiah 25:11). The weeping prophet had reason to be concerned for his people. They faced seventy years in exile to make a recompense for their sin.

Jeremiah, however, also envisioned a day when the tables would be turned, and the Babylonians would be punished for their sins: "And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations" (Jeremiah 25:12). Daniel found himself living during the seventy years of exile, and he wanted to ensure that his people would take the appropriate steps to see Jeremiah's prophecy fulfilled. Before the exiles could return to Jerusalem, they needed to return to their God.

## II. DANIEL'S DESIRE

### A. For Israel's Return to God

Daniel ascertained Judah's position in history through careful study of the Book of Jeremiah: "In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem" (Daniel 9:2). Bible study can be a great impetus for prayer, and the wise man Daniel recognized the pivotal moment in which he and his people found themselves. Daniel wrote, "And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes" (Daniel 9:3).

In seeking God for his people, Daniel had the opportunity to do something that

Jeremiah could not. In Jeremiah 11:14, the Lord told the prophet, "Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble." God would not hear the prayers of the people because they had broken the covenant through disobedience and idol worship.

Even though the Lord had forbidden Jeremiah to cry out, Daniel remained determined to touch God for his people. First, he engaged in a prayer in which he confessed the sins of his people. He also made supplication for the people, meaning that he sought the favor of one greater than himself. Daniel knew how to make requests of earthly kings. Now he entreated the God of Heaven for grace.

Likely accustomed to nice clothes because of his governmental position, Daniel humbled himself and donned sackcloth to engage in mourning for his people. He also fasted. His fasting for his people calls to mind the words of Jesus in Mark 9:29: "This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting." Daniel found himself in a spiritual battle, and he needed to eschew his everyday food for an extraordinary miracle.

### B. To Be in Harmony with the Will of God

Daniel wanted to do everything possible to connect with God. While he could have relied on his relationship with the Lord and recounted the miracles of the past, he saw the need to reverence the Lord before making his petitions. He 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" (Daniel 9:4).

Daniel's prayer seems curious because he references people who love the Lord and those who keep His commandments. The people of Judah had done neither. Daniel's reference of the covenant also placed the people of God in a bad light. They had repeatedly broken the covenant through sin. Their liaisons with false gods had led to a severely damaged relationship between the Lord and the people of Judah.

Yet Daniel knew the covenant could be renewed. He also knew the tremendous power of God's mercy. Perhaps he called to mind

the words of Lamentations 3:22–23: “It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.” Daniel knew that a day of mercy would dawn at the end of the seventy years. Before turning their faces to Jerusalem to begin the journey home, the people needed to turn away from sin and turn back to God in repentance.

### III. DANIEL PRAYED

#### A. Identified with God’s People

While Daniel often engaged in personal devotions in prayer, this time he decided to make corporate supplication for his people. For those who feared to pray, he prayed in their stead. For those low in faith in the midst of the troubling years of the exile, he lifted up his voice. For those struggling with the attraction of Babylonian gods, Daniel stood in the gap and attempted to draw them back to the one true God.

Most important, the righteous Daniel recognized his sinful nature and the wickedness of his people. Although Daniel could have championed his faithfulness to God, he identified himself as a member of a sinful people by moving from “I” to “we.” He said, “We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments” (Daniel 9:5). This confession of sin not only spoke for those who recognized the reason for the exile, but also for those who may have denied that iniquity was the cause of their captivity.

Daniel’s prayer negated every objection. He recognized the deceptive nature of sin just as John did: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:8–10). God’s people had sinned, and they needed to confess their unrighteousness.

#### B. Confessed the Sins of the People

In his confession, Daniel noted the rebellious nature of God’s people. Many of them

had prided themselves in their offerings and sacrifices. The Lord, however, had grown weary of these. God valued obedience over sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22). Because the people had so devalued submission to God and His precepts, the Lord had taken away the very place where the people sacrificed.

In dedicating the Temple, King Solomon had foreseen a situation in which God’s people might find themselves in exile because of their sins (1 Kings 8:46–50). The wise king prayed that the Lord would hear them and forgive their sin if they confessed it. Daniel acted on the words of the king, acknowledging the sin of his people.

He noted that the people had not only failed to obey the commandments of the Lord, but they had rejected the word of the prophets. Daniel prayed, “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” (Daniel 9:6). God had warned everyone about the consequences of sin, yet they had failed to listen.

#### C. Recognized Their Captivity Was a Result of Sin

The Lord had delivered the people into the land of confusion because of their iniquity. Daniel prayed, “O LORD, righteousness belongeth unto thee” (Daniel 9:7). In his prayer, Daniel may have considered Isaiah’s corporate recognition of sin: “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isaiah 64:6). Unrighteousness had driven God’s people away because of the trespasses they had committed (Daniel 9:7). They had no one to blame for the captivity but themselves.

#### D. Appealed to God’s Mercy

Daniel knew that God would respond to the confession of sin. Perhaps he remembered the words of the psalmist: “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah” (Psalm 32:5). Judah’s iniquity had been laid bare by the Babylonian

invasion and captivity. Just because God had punished His people for their sin, did not mean they had repented.

Daniel sought the mercy of God for the people because he knew that both vengeance and mercy belong to the Lord. He took solace in the fact that Jeremiah had prophesied seventy years of punishment. Ironically, this declaration of judgment offered hope. Daniel knew that God had set an end date for the Exile. God would soon relent, and revenge would give way to forgiveness. Daniel again focused on God's righteousness and mercy in his prayer: "for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies" (Daniel 9:18). Sadly, God's righteousness and mercy had lain dormant due to the prayerlessness of the people.

### **E. Repented for the People**

The people had not received forgiveness because they had not asked. Daniel said, "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" (Daniel 9:13). Therefore Daniel took it upon himself to enter into a time of corporate prayer for his people. He needed to pray for the people because he did not want their sin carried forward to the next generation. The Book of Numbers explained the severity of the situation and encouraged the prayer of repentance. "The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now" (Numbers 14:18–19).

Daniel repented not only for the sake of his people but also to prevent their children from suffering due to their unrepentant hearts. He admitted some of the wrongs they may have felt unwilling to acknowledge. Like Nehemiah, he recognized that some of the leaders may not have confessed their sin: "Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done

wickedly: neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them" (Nehemiah 9:33–34). Daniel confessed both his own sin and the sin of the people of Israel because he wanted them to be delivered from the bondage of the Exile.

### **F. Asked God to Return Israel Home So His Name Was Honored**

Daniel's prayer of forgiveness included a request to return home. He made his petition in the will of God because he wanted God's face to shine upon the desolate sanctuary again. The return of the people meant the possibility of rebuilding the Temple. Daniel wanted God to look on the city called by His name. If God answered Daniel's prayer, Jerusalem would no longer be desolate. Once again, God's people would fill its streets. Most significantly, Daniel wanted the Lord to answer his prayer because of the way it would glorify God: "Defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name" (Daniel 9:19). A desolate people could once again return to the city of their God and rebuild the Temple of the Lord—all for the glory of God.

## **IV. DANIEL PREVAILED**

### **A. Visitation of Gabriel**

Daniel himself received a great blessing through prayer. The angel Gabriel came and spoke to him. Gabriel promised to give Daniel skill and understanding. Daniel was a man chosen by the king of Babylon for his wisdom and knowledge. Daniel had prayed to gain more knowledge, and he had advanced in both the Babylonian and Persian governments. God, however, had even bigger plans for Daniel. He wanted to provide him with the gifts to understand future events that would play out on the world stage.

### **B. Received Much More Than He Was Seeking**

Daniel began his prayer in the hope that he could appeal to the mercy and forgiveness of God so that Jeremiah's seventy years would be fulfilled and God would raise

up His people out of exile. When Daniel prayed about the seventy years, he received the prophecy of seventy weeks. Gabriel told him about the Messiah, the rebuilding of the walls, and the restoration of Jerusalem. Daniel also saw the great desolation that would come in the end times.

Perhaps Daniel was able to receive the vision because he refused to let go of the mercies of God. Perhaps God chose to give him an angelic visitation because Daniel took the sins of his people upon him in prayer, foreshadowing the one who would offer mercy to all by bearing the weights of the sins of the world upon the cross.

## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Oftentimes our prayers focus on our individual needs. Though we may bring others to the Lord in prayer, we are more likely to pray for healing and financial blessing than repenting for the sins of our family or our nation. Daniel's example of corporate prayer calls us to a new level of intercession. We can pray a prayer of repentance for an unsaved

loved one. That individual must still ask the Lord for forgiveness, but our appeal to the Lord's mercy can still have a significant impact. Just as God dispatched Gabriel to help Daniel, the Lord may send help to the one lost in the darkness of sin.

Daniel's example further challenges us to confess the sins of our nation and to pray for restoration. When times seem bad, we may complain about politics or the current state of immorality in our world. We would do well to remember II Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." Daniel humbled himself even though he was not the primary problem in his nation. He sought God's face when it seemed as though many of his countrymen were focused on Babylon. God answered Daniel's prayer, and healing came to the land of Judah in the form of returning exiles, rebuilt walls, and a reconstructed Temple. Our prayers may also bind up a broken world and change things for the better. ■

## REFLECTIONS

- Take an inventory of your current prayer life. Whom or what do you pray for? How often do you pray?
- How will Daniel's example of corporate prayer change the way you approach the Lord?
- Bible study of the Book of Jeremiah preceded Daniel's prayer. What are some ways you can incorporate study of the Word in your prayer time?
- Daniel prayed for leaders and friends whom he knew had sinned. How can we turn our negative attitudes towards others into positive times of prayer and supplication?
- How powerful is the prayer of repentance and confession? Think about a time when you confessed a sin. How did you feel after you prayed?