

GODLY LIVING IN A GODLESS WORLD

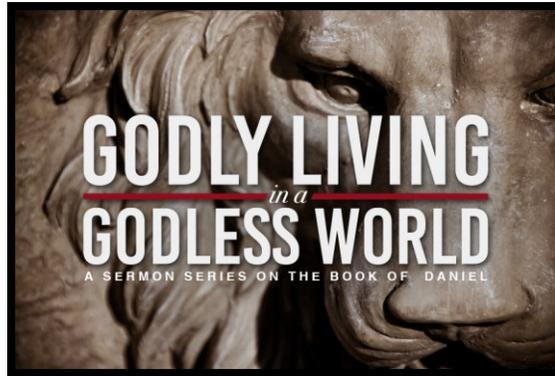
Expositional Study Of Daniel

Daniel 9:1

Written By

©Pastor Marty Baker

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After five frustrating weeks of attempting to devise the U.S. Constitution, the Founding Fathers faced the fact their work might be a failure. As they all prepared to break up and head home, Benjamin Franklin gave them this impassioned challenge at this pivotal time in history:

In this situation of this Assembly, groping as it were in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of Lights to illuminate our understanding? In the beginning of the contest with Great Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayer in this room for the Divine protection. Our prayers, sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a superintending Providence in our favor. . . . And have we now forgotten that powerful Friend? Or do we imagine we no longer need His assistance? I have lived, sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth – that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, sir, in the Sacred Writings, that “except the Lord build the House, they labor in vain that build it.” I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without His concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel. . . . I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our

deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business.¹

Franklin not only believed their prayers had been answered for the Revolution, but he firmly believed they needed to pray to the Almighty for wisdom, understanding, and strength to successfully finish the noble endeavor providentially placed before them. Ten weeks later an ingenious and cohesive document was formed which has become the backbone of the longest standing constitutional form of government in world history, giving peace and prosperity to millions of people.

Looking back at whole process for creating our Constitution, Franklin stated later:

[I] beg I may not be understood to infer that our general Convention was Divinely inspired when it formed the new federal Constitution . . . [yet] I can hardly conceive a transaction of such momentous importance to the welfare of millions now existing (and to exist in the posterity of a great nation) should be suffered to pass without being in some degree influenced, guided, and governed by that omnipotent, omnipresent, and beneficent Ruler in Whom all inferior spirits “live and move and have their being” [Acts 17:28].²

Franklin’s observations could not have been more spot on. God had been with them, and they sought His profound wisdom and guidance in the complexity of the times, and He answered them, did He not?

Two hundred and twenty-nine years later, we all know we stand at another pivotal time in the history of our nation, as we all know it. We will either progress or digress in every sphere, become constructive or destructive, tolerant of all evils masquerading as morality or intolerant of evil while being tolerant of absolute truth, and we will be either a light in the darkness or place of great darkness disguised as light. Yes, we are at a critical point in our nation’s history. What are we to do?

We should follow the example of God-fearing men, men like Daniel. He went into Babylonian captivity in 605 B.C., he willingly served throughout his life the wicked, despotic leaders who destroyed his country, he stayed in politics and made a positive impact because he did not compromise biblical truth and his faith in the living God, and even in his 80s when the Babylonians fell to the Medo-Persians, he stepped back into political office and stood strong and true for God. And shortly after the Medo-Persians assumed power in 539 B.C., Daniel sensed he, along with his people, stood at another pivotal point in history. What did he do? He did what all godly, God-fearing people do. He prayed and by so doing he illustrated a principle we can, and should, emulate as we stand at our own national crossroads:

¹ Max Farrand, *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, Vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1911), 450-452, from James Madison’s Notes on the Convention for June 28, 1787.

² Benjamin Franklin, *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*, Jared Sparks, editor (Boston: Tappan, Whittemore, and Mason, 1837), Vol. V, p. 162, from “A Comparison of the Conduct of the Ancient Jews and of the Anti-Federalists in the United States of America,” no date.

Powerful Prayer Is Needed At Pivotal Times (Daniel 9:1-19)

After the Exodus, Moses offered a prayer song to the God who had delivered His people at the critical time when the Egyptians had them pinned up against the Red Sea (Exodus 15). David's entire life, as a soldier and a politician, evidenced the need to pray in tough times (Psalm 7, 9, 17). Solomon dedicated Israel's glorious temple with words directed to the throne of God (1 Kings 8:27-30). Nehemiah, when faced with a rough report about his people back in Israel, prayed for God's direction and intervention (Nehemiah 1). Ezra, the godly scribe, led the post-exilic nation into revival with a prayer to end all prayers (Ezra 9-10). Repeatedly we see throughout biblical history that God's saints prayed in a profound fashion when God placed them at a crucial, life and nation altering juncture, and God answered. No wonder Dwight L. Moody once quipped, "Every great movement of God can be traced to a kneeling figure."³ Sometime around 539 B.C. another deeply spiritual and mature saint sensed the unusual nature of the moment and he became that kneeling figure leading to a movement of God we will never forget.

A study of Daniel's profound and powerful prayer reveals its nature, and this reality, in turn, serves to give us a model to follow as we consider our own pivotal time, be it national or personal. Our hermeneutical analysis of Daniel's prayer readily reveals its six-fold structure. As we dig into these concepts, let me remind you this is no purely intellectual exercise. Far from it. We study Daniel's prayer structure to learn from it, to apply it, and to ask ourselves, "Am I prepared to pray like this so God's power is unleashed at this pivotal time which is before me?"

Verses 1 through 2 introduce us to the first timeless prayer concept.

Consider The Flint of Powerful Prayer (Daniel 9:1-2)

What is a flint? It is a rocky substance which produces sparks when struck against steel. What is the flint which produces the fire of powerful prayer? We bump into this much needed answer in the opening two verses of chapter 9:

¹ In the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus, by birth a Mede, who became king over the realm of the Chaldeans— ² in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to the prophet Jeremiah, must be fulfilled for the devastation of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

Sometime around 539 B.C., God made Cyrus the king over Babylon,⁴ and sometime after this Daniel read, probably in his daily devotions, an amazing prophecy from the inspired pen of the prophet Jeremiah:

³Mark Water, compiler, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 781.

⁴Arguments for Cyrus being Darius: One, it is well-known that Cyrus ancestrally was both Mede (through his mother, Mandane, who was also the daughter of the Median king, Astyages and granddaughter of Cyaxeres the Great) and Persian (through his father, Cambyses I). By calling him "Darius the Mede," as well as Cyrus, Daniel revealed how this one man led the prophesied Medo-Persian empire (Daniel 2:39). Two, Herodotus, in his *Histories* (425 A.D.), also states that Cyrus' Median mother didn't give him the name Cyrus at his birth, leading us to believe it was, you guessed it, Darius. Three, whereas some take the textual statements that he "received the kingdom (5:31) and "was made ruler"

⁸ Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, ⁹ I am going to send for all the tribes of the north, says the LORD, even for King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, my servant [*Special note: God employed a polytheistic, ruthless, war mongering king to advance His purposes with His people, Israel. This should give us guidance in this complex presidential voting season. Do your civic duty and vote, realizing God will work in and through whichever candidate winds up winning*], and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these nations around; I will utterly destroy them, and make them an object of horror and of hissing, and an everlasting disgrace. ¹⁰ And I will banish from them the sound of mirth and the sound of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. ¹¹ This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years (Jeremiah 25).

With great excitement, Daniel probably kept unrolling the scroll until he came to what we now call chapter 29 of Jeremiah:

¹⁰ For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. ¹² Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you (Jeremiah 29).

Don't you know his jaw hit the proverbial floor when he read these prophetic words?

The New American Standard Version states Daniel read from "the books," while the New International Version calls them "the Scriptures." Both statements do not reflect the Hebrew which literally reads, "in the scrolls" (סְפָרִים). Which scrolls? The scrolls containing the books the Jews believed were God's Word to this point in revelatory history Daniel, therefore, probably had access to the Torah, or the first five books of the Old Testament, and portions of the Prophets, which combined represented the rest of the two-fold division of the Scriptures (Luke 16:16, 29, 31; Acts 13:15).

What did he learn as he read from Jeremiah, who prophesied to the last five kings of Judah before the Babylonian victory (609-596 B.C.)? Daniel learned the captivity was supposed to last seventy years. Why this lengthy of time? This answer comes from God's warning in the book of Leviticus 25:

¹ The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: ² Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a sabbath for the LORD. ³ Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; ⁴ but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard.

(9:1) to denote that Cyrus, the King, must have made someone else, like Gubaru and/or Ugbaru the governor, one can easily and logically remark that these clauses could be referencing God giving Cyrus/Darius the new kingdom.

According to God, every six years the Israelites were supposed to let the land rest and replenish itself for one year. Probably motivated by greed and needs they blew right by this seemingly restrictive command and pushed the land by with their planting and pruning. God never forgot their willful sin. For 490 years they thought everything was going great because nothing happened to them. No fire. No brimstone. No jagged bolts of lightning. But for all those years God patiently kept count, and when His judgment came, which it always does, He caused them to serve one year for every seven year cycle of sabbatical rest they had failed to observe. This is how God, in perfect justice, calculated the proper time length of the disciplinary Babylonian captivity. Thinking minds should take note. While you might think you are getting away with your sin because nothing has basically happened to you, just know that God does keep track of your activity (Romans 2:1-5), and there will come the time when His perfect justice is leveled against you.

In any event, Daniel did the math. He was taken in the first of three Babylonian waves of captivity in the year 605 B.C. (2 Kings 24:1-7). Subtracting 70 years brought him to 535 B.C., which ostensibly meant that since it was around 539 B.C. the time for Israel's divinely appointed release was imminent! How exciting! However, being a thinking person, he must have thought, "Now, if God is calculating from the second deportation in 597 B.C. (2 Kings 24:10-16), that will put our deliverance at 527 B.C. If He is figuring based on the third deportation in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25:1-12), well, then 516 B.C. is in view. Either way, these last two time possibilities are way beyond the time I will probably live. I wonder. Is He going to free us in my lifetime based on the first calculation?" Note. Daniel didn't allegorize or spiritualize Jeremiah's prophecy. He looked for a literal fulfillment of those prophetic words in real time and space, and possibly in his lifetime. How exciting!

From this flash of prophetic insight, the aged Daniel bowed in prayer before the eternal God, seeking His wisdom, knowledge, insight, and mercy. Mark well what started the flame of powerful prayer in his life. It was the flint called the Word of God. Show me a person who knows how to pray with great power and I'll show you someone who is reading and studying the Scriptures. As they understand the heart of God, the ways of God, the thinking of God, and the purposes of God, they cannot help but pray with power. Further, as they see how prophecy has been precisely fulfilled, and as they see how it is being fulfilled before their eyes, they will not be moved to fear but to fearful and powerful praying before the living God who stands ready to hear them.

Let me ask you a personal question. Is your prayer life empowered by the Word of God? When's the last time you became pumped up in prayer by what God has disclosed to you in your study? Better yet, when's the last time your study of prophecy moved you from just relishing in the facts of what God has said He will do to falling in prayer before Him in light of what He's about to do? The point from Daniel's life be displayed on every church marquee: Powerful prayer flows out of an active and perpetual reading of the Holy Scriptures.

A second concept is equally important.

Consider The Formulation Of Powerful Prayer (Daniel 9:3)

Don't miss how Daniel approached God in prayer:

³ Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

Once the Spirit of God spoke to him through the inspired Word, Daniel wasted no time turning to seek an answer and clarification from God. Slow down and focus on this, please. Not only did Daniel believe the living God had spoken to Jeremiah some eighty years prior, he believed God could still speak to him too. What an intimate relationship, and it is one which is still available to saints today. Paul develops this point clearly in his letter to the Corinthians:

¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, ¹³ which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words* (1 Corinthians 2).

He teaches us, and He does this most effectively through the Word of God. Believe me, there is nothing more profound than when you are studying the Scriptures, when you are weighing and thinking about what God has said, and then, all of a sudden, a flash of insight comes to your heart and mind, insight you know has come from Him. There is just nothing like it in all of the world. It is the living God communicating directly with you through His inspired book. Amazing.

Moments of connection with God through the Word typically move the soul toward moving, passionate, and, at times, passionate and emotional prayer. Daniel walked down this well-worn path. His exciting insights moved him to seek further divine clarification by means of prayer, supplication, which is the Hebrew word for crying out for help from someone in authority, and to these approaches he added fasting while dressed in sackcloth and placing ashes upon his head. What did fasting accomplish? Abstaining from food, showed God that Daniel meant business in his prayer and that he was focused. Concerning the value of fasting, the late Andrew Murray wisely concluded:

Prayer is reaching out and after the unseen; fasting, letting go of all that is seen and temporal. Fasting helps express, deepens, confirms the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, even ourselves, to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God.⁵

Stop and take stock of your life right now. When's the last time the insights you gained from your reading of the Scriptures so moved you, you sought even more insight from God and you desired to show Him how serious you were that you actually fasted? I fear we too readily think God will give us insight and wisdom if it costs us little. Through Daniel's example God calls us onward and upward in the faith, really, He calls us to head to a whole new spiritual level in our maturity. He says to us, "If you want keen insight regarding how to navigate at this pivotal time in your life and country, then you must first get serious about reading the Word of God, and, then, you must let that Word move you to fervent, sacrificial prayer." Perhaps the reason your prayer life is not

⁵Mark Water, compiler, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 782.

powerful is because it is not based on this overt formula for power. Today is the day to change course.

Consider The Focus Of Powerful Prayer (Daniel 9:4)

Pay strict attention to how Daniel addressed God:

⁴ I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, “Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments,

He prayed to “the LORD” (לַיהוָה), which is the English equivalent of Yahweh, or the God of the burning bush, the great I AM of all time and space (Exodus 3:15). By using this term, Daniel underscored that he realized the times, as trying as they were nationally and personally, were firmly under the control of the One who created time. Also, by using this term, Daniel highlights that he remembers this God was none other than the great covenantal God of Israel. He is the unique, timeless God who created the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1), who established the Davidic covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:25-27), and who promised a New covenant with Israel wherein He would redeem and bless them beyond measure at the end of time (Jeremiah 31:31-40). Using this name was, therefore, no accident, but it served to let God know that he knew God had not only given Israel their covenants but He would be good to fulfill them to the letter.

By turning and calling the LORD “my God,” Daniel tapped into the first name of God in the Torah, Elohim, from Genesis 1:1 (אֱלֹהִים בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ). El means mighty in Hebrew (Deuteronomy 10:17), and it highlights God’s governing and creative power. As such it is not shocking to find it used thirty-five times from Genies 1:1 to 2:4, for He is the One with the unlimited power to bring complexity out of nothing. Daniel’s employment of this term revealed he knew, as God’s prophet, of God’s ability to use His raw, limitless creative power to do what needed to be done to free the Israelites from Babylonian bondage.

Further, by focusing on the character of God, Daniel let God know he knew that God would, based on His proven character, keep the covenants He has establish with Israel many years ago. Seventy years of bondage, of trouble, of loss, of persecution, of personal turmoil, of personal loss would not erase God’s promise to His people. And Daniel’s stress on God’s steadfast love, or *hesed* in Hebrew (חֶסֶד), served to picture a love which would never let go, no matter what. As the Psalmist said years prior to Jeremiah, “O Israel, hope in the LORD, for with the LORD there is lovingkindness (*hesed*), and with Him is abundant redemption” (Psalm 130:7).

Daniel’s prayer possessed great power, as we shall see in our ensuing studies, because it contained a strategic divine focus. He didn’t just casually pick any old name of God, but one’s which pertained to the situation at hand. He could have called Him El Shaddai (the Almighty), Jehovah-jireh (the God who Provides), Jehovah M’Kaddesh (the God who Sanctifies), or Jehovah-rohi (the God who Sees), but he didn’t because the names he selected matched the foundational direction of his prayer for wisdom, insight and clarification of Jeremiah’s prophecy.

What about your prayer life reflects these thoughts about God’s names? Do you just arbitrarily use the same name all the time, or do you vacillate based on the content of the prayer? If you were to employ another than for God when you prayed, which would you chose and why? As God’s character is multi-faceted, His names are as well. Selecting ones which directly relate to

what you are praying about not only gives Him focused glory, but it serves to let Him know you know the meaning of these profound, memorable names and how they should be brought to bear on your particular prayer.

Some two-thousand-five-hundred-and-thirty-nine years ago an old, weathered, highly experienced politician knew from his reading of God's Word that he and his people stood at a pivotal juncture of world history. Instead of being overwhelmed with the chaotic nature of the geo-political situation of his day, instead of thinking the concept of freedom was now beyond the pale of God's intervention, instead of being jaded into thinking God had forgotten him and them, this faithful saint did what you are supposed to do in those historical situations. He prayed with great power for God to speak and for God to move. At the end of this chapter you will discover that God answered both of those pleas in a way which shows He does, in fact, hear and act in ways which leave the world a much better place.

We now stand at another pivotal point in history. The question is will your Bible study lead to powerful prayer resulting God directed change? And this is not change you want to see, but change that is God's will as revealed in His Word. The time for playin' is over and the time for prayin' is here. Show me a person who wants to accomplish much for God, who wants to breathe life where there is death, who wants to turn followers of darkness into followers of light, and I'll show you a simple saint kneeling before the throne of the Almighty.