



## **Dare To Argue With God In Prayer!**

### **Pilgrim Living in the 21st Century**

**Daniel 9**

**David Sunday**

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As you're turning to Daniel 9, let me remind you where we are in the story of Daniel. Back in the Garden of Eden, God created the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, and put them in a perfect environment where they could flourish. He gave them all things to enjoy, but there was one tree in the middle of that Garden from which they were told they must not eat. It was a test for Adam and Eve to trust in the word of God.

Satan came in the form of a serpent and defied God's word. He told Eve, "Did God really say that? You will not surely die." Eve disobeyed the word of God, and Adam followed her, which is how sin infected humanity. All of us have been contaminated with this deadly disposition to disobey God's Word. It's in all of us.

But God did not give up on the human race. Instead, He told a man named Abraham, "You're going to belong to Me. I am going to make of you a great nation." Sure enough, God blessed the descendants of Abraham, and His desire was to make them a blessing to all the earth and that all the earth would come to know Him through the children of Abraham.

But the children of Abraham ended up in slavery in Egypt. God in His great mercy delivered them from their bondage 430 years later. On their way from Egypt into the Promised Land, God met them at the foot of Mt. Sinai, where he gave their leader Moses a covenant. At the heart of that covenant were commandments in which God promised great blessing—great enjoyment in their relationship with Him—if they would listen to His voice and obey His commandments.

Once again, however, they defied God's words. They did not obey. And throughout the history of God's people, He sent His prophets again and again to speak His word to His people with clarity and power. But the people did not listen to the prophets. While God was patient and longsuffering with the people, He finally chose to discipline them by sending judgment in the form of the nation of Babylon. Babylon invaded Jerusalem, taking the people captive and scattering them throughout the Mediterranean world, but many of them—including Daniel—ended up in Babylon.

Yet God never intended to leave His people there permanently. This was a discipline from God, not a rejection. He had not abandoned His people. Rather, God promised through the prophet Jeremiah that after 70 years of exile in Babylon, He would bring His people back to their land, and they would return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

This is where we find ourselves in Daniel 9. Daniel is an old man now, about 80 years old, and he's been exiled in Babylon for about 65 years—since he was a teenager. All that time he's been faithfully praying toward Jerusalem, faithfully meditating on the Scriptures, and faithfully living as a pilgrim in a foreign land that was hostile toward God. Look at what we read in verses one and two:

*In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—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 Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.*

So here a new king is in charge. The Babylonian empire has fallen. The Medo-Persians are now ruling the empire. Daniel's reading in his Bible the words of Jeremiah the prophet, which he receives as being the word of God, and he perceives that the exile is about to end. Can you imagine the excitement in this old man, as he's doing the calculations? "Let's see. I got here when I was about 15. I've been here 55 years. It says 70 years and the exile will be over. That means soon we're going to return to the Promised Land!"

His response to this great news is to humble himself, putting on sackcloth and ashes. I love what he does in verse three. "*Then I turned my face to the Lord God.*" Isn't that a beautiful description of prayer? "*I turned my face toward the Lord God.*" There's an intensity here. They're gazing at God here. There's an earnestness here: sackcloth, ashes, fasting, humiliation before God. And it's with that attitude that Daniel prays.

Before we read his prayer, I can just imagine that some of you came to church today with your faces covered with shame. You don't even know how you managed to get here. But as we've sung and as we've heard some of God's Word already, in your heart you feel a distance from God. You're far more aware of your sin right now than you are of God's mercy. You do not feel like you can draw near to God. You don't have a desire for Him, but rather are feeling a chill over your heart spiritually.

I hope I'm not the only one who ever feels that way coming to church. I think we know that experience. But I want you to imagine walking into church feeling that way, and then

sometime during the service, an old man who's walked with God for many, many years, comes up into the pulpit. And as you listen to him praying—pleading with God for mercy, seeking God's glory—you sense this man knows God. He fears and loves God, and he believes God is a merciful God.

As this man prays, your heart starts to melt, and you find yourself wanting to draw near to God. I'm praying that will be your experience as you listen to Daniel's prayer. I pray that you would imagine yourself being in Daniel's presence, eavesdropping on his prayer, and that the Lord would find in you what He says He loves to draw near to: a broken and contrite heart that trembles at His Word.

May God be worshiped, may He stir our hearts to prayer, as we listen to this holy man of God. Daniel 9:4-19:

*<sup>4</sup> I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>5</sup> we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. <sup>6</sup> We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. <sup>7</sup> To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. <sup>8</sup> To us, O Lord, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. <sup>9</sup> To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him <sup>10</sup> and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. <sup>11</sup> All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him. <sup>12</sup> He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity. For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth. <sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord has kept ready the calamity and has brought it*

*upon us, for the Lord our God is righteous in all the works that he has done, and we have not obeyed his voice. <sup>15</sup> And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly.*

*<sup>16</sup> “O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill, because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us. <sup>17</sup> Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. <sup>18</sup> O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. <sup>19</sup> O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.”*

Thanks be to God for His living Word.

All through his life, since his teenage years, Daniel has been praying. He knows his God deeply. As I’ve been reading his prayer and thinking about it, I’ve often been taken aback and humbled. I told the Lord, “I don’t think I’ve ever prayed like this.” The reason we don’t pray like Daniel prayed is that we don’t know Daniel’s God like he knew his God—yet. We can still grow in our knowledge of God.

Daniel was 80 when he prayed this. Isn’t it refreshing to find an old saint who has walked with God for many years? Isn’t it true that often the longer the saints walk with God, the deeper their prayer lives become? Although their bodies might be failing, there is a richness in their prayer lives. May that be true of you seniors in our church. We need great examples of prayer.

I think Daniel would love the line from one of John Newton’s hymns where he says this about prayer:

You are coming to a King  
Great petitions with you bring  
For His grace and power are such  
None can ever ask too much

God’s greatness, grace and power are so great that you can never ask too much from Him. Yet sometimes we ask way too little, don’t we? Sometimes our prayers are so small in

comparison with what they could be. So I want to consider four reasons why our prayers might be too small, and then I want to dare you to argue with God in prayer like Daniel does.

## Four Reasons Our Prayers Might Be Too Small

### 1. Our God is too small

Our prayers might be too small because we might have too small of a view of God. The first words out of Daniel's mouth in this prayer set the tone for the whole chapter: "*O Lord, the great and awesome God.*" That's Who God was to Daniel. That's Who God is. He is the great and awesome God, worthy of awe, to be trembled before. There is nothing too difficult for Him. We have a great and awesome God, and He is sovereign over history.

That's the big picture of Daniel 9, from beginning to end. God wants us to know throughout this book of Daniel that He is sovereign over all. Whatever you do to oppose Him is an exercise in futility. He is a great and awesome God. Notice how often God's attributes are featured in Daniel's prayer. His prayer is filled with adoration for God.

In verse four, He is a God Who "*keeps covenant and steadfast love.*" He's faithful and loyal in His love toward His people. Verse seven: He's the Lord to Whom "*belongs righteousness.*" In verse nine, to Him "*belong mercy and forgiveness.*" In verse 12, He is a God Who confirms His word, Who keeps all His words. In verse 14, He is a God Who "*is righteous in all the works that he has done.*" In verse 16, He is a God of righteous acts, a God of anger and wrath. And in verse 17, thank God, He is a God of mercy. In verse 18, Daniel speaks of God's great mercy. Here is a man who knows his God.

Friends, don't settle for a vague sense of God. Don't settle for shallow, superficial notions of your God. Get to know Him in a specific way. Get to know Him for Who He is. Why do you think God gave us the Bible? Is the reason we read the Bible so that we can get a little blessing in the morning, or so we can get some immediate and practical application? If it is, we're not reading our Bibles for the reason God gave them.

The main reason God gave us His Word is so that we can know Him, so that we would behold our God in the Scriptures. And as we come to the Scriptures, our first and our foremost and our constant prayer should be, "O God, show me Your glory." I love the way the psalmist prays in Psalm 25:4-5:

*Make me to know your ways, O Lord;  
teach me your paths.  
Lead me in your truth and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;*

*for you I wait all the day long.*

If that's the cry of our heart as we come to the Scriptures—"O God, I want to know Who You are! I want to understand Your ways"—that's a prayer God loves to answer. God is eager to reveal Himself to those who seek Him. He is a Rewarder of those who seek Him, and He rewards us by showing us more of Himself.

So ask God to enlarge your vision of Him, to deepen your understanding of Him and make you know Him personally—not just conceptually. He's a living God. He's not a God Who's known through concepts. He is a God Who is known when we set our face toward Him and seek Him through His Word, when we treat Him as the personal God that He is. He wants you to know Him.

## 2. Our sense of sin is too shallow

You'll notice that just as much as Daniel speaks of the attributes of God, he also speaks of the sinfulness of his people—and of himself. His God is righteous—we are not. God is faithful to His Word—we are not faithful to our word. God is great and awesome—and I've got news for you: you and I are not great and awesome. We are finite and frail.

The more you see of God's greatness, the more clearly you will see your own sins. It's like going into a house in the middle of the night when it's all dark. The house might be filthy, but if you don't turn on the lights, you don't know it—until the sun shines in. When the sun shines in, you see all the dust. The more the light of God and His glory are shining into our hearts, the more we see our own sinfulness.

Look at what John Newton said: "The more vile we are in our own eyes, the more precious Christ will be to us." See how repeatedly Daniel confesses the sin of his people. In verse five, he says, "*We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules.*" He names sin for what it is. He calls it bad names. He doesn't make excuses. He doesn't brush it under the rug. He doesn't try to clean it up a little bit. It's bad! He abhors his sin.

At the heart of that sin, he goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. "*We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name*" (9:6). Over and over again in this prayer—in verses six, nine and 11—Daniel gets right to the heart of it. "We've rebelled against You. We've not obeyed Your voice. We've not walked in Your laws. We've turned away

from You, God.” We see it repeatedly in this prayer. “There’s a stubbornness to us, Lord. There’s this deadly disposition in our hearts to disobey Your Word.”

Verse 13 says, “*All this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth.*” We are hard-headed. You keep disciplining us, Lord, and we’re still not repenting. We’re still not confessing what’s wrong with us, Lord. We’re rebels. We disobey Your Word.

I find it striking that Daniel includes himself in this confession. He keeps saying, “We, we, we, we.” And look at verse 20: “*While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel...*” Daniel, you’re a sinner too? You’re so holy. Looking at all the other people in the Bible, we know David was a sinner. We know Moses was a sinner. But when you read the book of Daniel, he looks so clean. He looks so righteous. But he knew himself to be a sinful man, and he’s confessing that before the Lord.

Friends, I want to ask you, “What do you think the chief problem in the world is right now?” We live in contentious times, don’t we? What are you most concerned about? ISIS? Border control? Political corruption? What’s eating away at you? What do you think is the biggest problem in the world right now? Daniel thought the biggest problem in the world was with God’s own people and with himself. Daniel doesn’t blame anything on Babylon, or Nebuchadnezzar, or Belshazzar, or Darius. He doesn’t say, “What’s with these rulers throwing us into fiery furnaces and dens of lions?” For Daniel, the central problem is with God’s people and with himself.

It’s not our circumstances or it’s not our environment that’s the problem in the world today—it’s our sin. That’s the way Daniel prays. He longs for God to change God’s people. That’s the heart of his prayer. Have you ever confessed sin like Daniel does? Have you ever experienced anything like this in prayer with other Christians?

Let me read you an eye-witness account from the book, [Korean Pentecost: The Great Revival of 1907](#). This is an eye-witness explaining what on happened the evening of January 6, 1907, in the Central Church in Pyongyang, Korea. He writes:

With more than 1,500 men present, after a short sermon, man after man would rise, confess his sin, break down and weep, and then throw himself on the floor and beat the floor with his fists in a perfect agony of conviction. Sometimes after a confession, the whole audience would break out into audible prayer, and the effect of that audience of hundreds of men praying together in audible prayer was something indescribable. Again, after another confession, they would break out into uncontrollable weeping, and we would all weep

together. We couldn't help it. And so the meeting went on until 2:00 a.m., with confession and weeping and praying. We had prayed to God for an outpouring of His Holy Spirit upon the people—and it had come.

What was the evidence of the Holy Spirit's outpouring? It was a general, awesome sense that spread to all: we need to confess our sins. Now, in order to specifically confess sin like Daniel is doing and like those Korean men were doing, we need to be confident about something in God's character.

### 3. Our confidence in God's mercy is too weak

The third reason our prayers might be too small is because our confidence in God's mercy is too weak. We need to have great confidence that God will be merciful. What is God's mercy? It's God sparing us from what our sins deserve. His grace is His giving us what we don't deserve. It's the ice cream cone after you've been a bad boy all day. Mercy is when you deserve to be thrown in jail, but He pardons you rather than giving you what you deserve.

If you believe that God will not be merciful to you, or if you don't have a deep confidence in His mercy, you're going to be like Adam and Eve in the Garden, trying to cover up your sin with fig leaves, hiding from God. You will not come into the light. You have to believe Psalm 40:11: "*As for you, O Lord, you will not restrain your mercy from me.*" Believe that! Dustin Buzzard says, "God is not a mercy miser." He's not stingy with His mercy. Daniel knows that.

I love the contrast in verses seven through nine, where he says, "*To us belongs open shame.*" Our faces are covered with shame. "*But to You, Lord, belongs righteousness and mercy and forgiveness.*" Do you see that in verse nine? "*To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness.*" Why? Not because we're so good. "*For we have rebelled against him.*" But He is a God Who is eager to spare us from the punishments our sins deserve. He is a God Who delights in mercy.

So Daniel concludes his prayer with a great plea for mercy in verses 17-19: "*Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine.*" This will bring You glory, God. That's the motive of his prayer. "When You show mercy to us, God, it brings glory to You." He ends this way:

*For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your*

*own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called  
by your name.*

A while back I read a beautiful section in The Valley of Vision. I wrote it in my journal, thinking, “If I had this view of God and His mercy and the privilege of prayer, there would be such peace in my life from day to day.” I’d like us to prime the pump for our praying together with this:

Grant me more and more to prize the privilege of prayer,  
to come to You as a sin-soiled sinner,  
to find pardon in You, to converse with You;  
to know You in prayer as the path in which my feet tread,  
the latch upon the door of my lips;  
the light that shines through my eyes,  
the music of my ears,  
the marrow of my understanding, the strength of my will,  
the power of my affection, the sweetness of my memory.

Lord, You are the light that shines through our eyes. You are the music of our ears, the marrow of our understanding, the strength of our will, the power of our affection. To spend an hour in prayer with You brings sweet memories, because You are so merciful.

#### 4. We don’t expect God to answer us

One last reason why our prayers might be too small is that we don’t expect God to answer us. We don’t even think He hears us. Look at verse 20:

*While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of  
my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the Lord my God  
for the holy hill of my God, while I was speaking in prayer, the man  
[angel] Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to  
me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice.*

Wouldn’t it be awesome to have this flying angel come in the middle of your prayers?

Gabriel says to Daniel, “I’m going to give you understanding. I’m going to give you a vision of things to come.” We’re not going to get into that vision today, but this we need to understand: People who pray are people who have insight and understanding. There are so many things God wants to give you wisdom about, but you’re only going to get that wisdom if you pray. People who pray have wisdom, insight and understanding.

Gabriel wants Daniel to know that when he began praying, God began to work. Verse 23, *“At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you.”* God’s answers may wait, but God’s attention is immediate when His people pray. He listens while we are still speaking. And the reason God loves to hear us pray and loves to answer our prayers is in verse 23: *“For you are greatly loved.”* What would it mean to you for an angel to fly to you as you pull into your driveway this afternoon and say to you, “God wants you to know that you are greatly loved”?

I don’t think that’s going to happen today, but I am a messenger of God, sent to say to you that though your face may be covered with shame, though you may have come into this service today feeling beaten down and worn out—even by your own sin and guilt—if you believe in the Servant God sent into the world to do what God describes in verse 24—*“to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness”*—if you believe that Jesus is that One Who came and died on the cross for you and put an end to your transgression and atoned for your iniquity, God wants you to know this very personally today: you are greatly loved. God wants you to take that to heart. He wants you to believe that. He wants that to motivate you to draw near to Him, not to stay at a distance. God Himself loves you.

But what happens when we start having our vision for God’s glory enlarged, when our God starts getting bigger? Our sense of sin starts to grow. Our confidence in His mercy gets stronger. What happens when those things are happening in our lives? We come boldly to the throne of grace to find mercy and grace to help in our time of need. We boldly come to God in prayer.

That’s what I want to dare you to do today. I want to dare you to argue with God in prayer. You might say, “That sounds sacrilegious.” No, it’s not. That’s what Daniel is doing. He’s not passive here. He knows God has made a promise in Jeremiah. Seventy years, then the exile will be over. Daniel doesn’t just say, “Okay, I’m going to sit and wait. God is sovereign. Why pray?” No, he says, “The sovereignty of God is what gives momentum to my prayer. God has made a promise. Now I’m going to plead with Him for the fulfillment of that promise. I’m going to argue with Him based on the promise of His own Word, and say, ‘God, You said You would do this—and now I am pleading with You to bring it to pass. God, we are sinful, but You are full of mercy. Therefore, look on us.’” That’s pleading. Those are arguments.

Puritan Richard Sibbes said, “Presenting arguments to God in prayer is an excellent thing.” So if the Puritans said it’s okay, then it’s not sacrilegious. It’s an excellent thing. He says

we should “study the Scriptures, and study all the arguments whereby holy men have prevailed with God...to see in what cases those arguments were used. They are of use and force to prevail with God.” Sibbes doesn’t want us just coming to God with vague prayers. He wants us coming to God with the promises of His Word, with the knowledge of His character. He wants us wrestling with God, pleading with God. He says, “It is a pitiful thing for Christians to come to God with bare, naked petitions...and have no reason to press God out of His Own Word.”

Another Puritan, John Owen, said that even though Daniel knew the time was coming for the exile to end, he prayed all the more earnestly for this reason:

Prayer helps the promise bring forth. Because a woman’s time is come, therefore shall she have no midwife? No! Therefore give her one. He that appointed their return appointed that it should be a fruit of prayer.

In other words, God made promises, and prayer is the midwife to the birthing of God’s promises in our lives. So plead with God now for the glory of His great name, as we come to Him in prayer. What glory would it bring to God to answer the greatest burdens you’re facing today? Let’s acknowledge that most of all, our plea is in His mercy, not in anything in us. Like Daniel says, “It’s not because of our righteousness—it’s because of Your mercy, O God, that we come to You” (9:18).

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## New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ [www.newcbc.org](http://www.newcbc.org)

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