

Daniel 9:1–19 / Luke 16:1–10 “What We Ask Before the Lord” 1 March 2026

1. Daniel was praying. That prayer is recorded in Daniel chapter 9. It tells us when he prayed and why he prayed. From v. 4 onwards, the content of his prayer is set out in full, without a single word omitted.
2. Yet the question is this: what exactly is he asking for in this prayer? The reason for the question is that the “what” of his request seems almost hidden. Try as we might to identify his specific petition, Daniel keeps repeating what sounds like something else entirely: “**O Lord, righteousness belongs to you, but to us open shame, as at this day...**”

3. Still, if we look more closely, we notice a number of sentences ending with “grant...” or “let...” These are his actual petitions. If we extract and list them, they read as follows:

First, v. 16: “O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill.”

4. Second, v. 17: “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.”

Third, v. 18: “O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations and the city that is called by your name.”

And when we reach v. 19, the appeals pour out: hear, forgive, act, do not delay.

5. At this point, it seems almost time to consult AI. One might type into ChatGPT: “Please summarise Daniel’s prayer requests in Daniel chapter 9.” Within a second, the answer might appear:
 - ① A request that God withdraw His wrath on the basis of His righteousness.
 - ② A plea for the restoration of the temple and Jerusalem.
 - ③ An appeal resting wholly upon God’s mercy.
6. We may not be entirely satisfied, yet we cannot help but be impressed that artificial intelligence can respond so efficiently. And what is more striking is how it ends by asking, “Would you like this structured for a sermon or discussion guide as well?”
7. It is the moment one suddenly feels the pastoral office under threat. One begins to wonder whether AI might soon be writing sermons as well. Before long, perhaps a handsome robot equipped with artificial intelligence will be standing in this very place.
8. In any case, Daniel presents three requests before God: that God would turn away His wrath, that He would restore the temple and Jerusalem, and that He would hear and answer this plea. He asks the Lord to look upon their present condition with compassion.
9. Yet one question remains: how would AI understand this prayer? For this prayer was offered in the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made ruler over the

Babylonian kingdom. Daniel prayed after discerning from the prophet Jeremiah the number of years appointed.

10. You may ask, what does that have to do with anything? The point is this: Daniel offered this prayer as the seventy years of exile were drawing to a close. In other words, he already knew that these three requests were about to be fulfilled. It was like believing that the clock never runs backwards. So the question is: does AI take that into account?
11. If we consider only the surface content, Daniel's prayer concerns forgiveness, return from exile, and the restoration of Jerusalem. Yet in the prophetic context, these things were already on the verge of happening. One might even suggest that Daniel, having returned from exile, could have been recalling and recording the prayer he had once made.
12. Darius son of Ahasuerus and Cyrus of Persia were contemporaries. Darius, called king of the Chaldeans here, was the ruler at the time Daniel prayed; Cyrus, king of Persia, was the one who permitted the Jewish exiles to return. Though historically the Babylonian and Persian empires were distinct, the time between Darius and Cyrus was not long.
13. So when Daniel understood that **"the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years,"** two concerns must have arisen in his heart. First, he would have asked himself what point in history he was now living through. Second, he would have wondered whether, when those seventy years were completed, he himself would still be alive to return home.
14. In any case, Daniel prayed: "O Lord, look upon our desolation; O Lord, forgive; do not delay!" But what exactly is he asking for? Is he asking for the seventy years to be shortened? Or, since the time is almost up, is he pleading for it to end immediately?
15. Suppose God had reduced the seventy years to sixty—would Daniel then have hurried back to rebuild Jerusalem himself? Or was he asking for something like a suspension of sentence, as though one righteous man might spare Sodom and Gomorrah? Was this what he meant by seeking forgiveness?
16. Consider v. 16: **"O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill."** But on what grounds should God turn away His wrath? The latter half of the verse explains: **"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."**
17. In other words, Daniel acknowledges that they are receiving the punishment that has been decreed. **"All this calamity has come upon us, just as it is written in the Law of Moses."** This is not an attempt to escape the sentence. It is, rather, a recognition that they will bear the full term appointed. His plea is simply that the appointed time of release has now arrived—not a request for a stay of execution or a special pardon.
18. Seventy years earlier, the sentence of Babylonian exile had been pronounced. Now those seventy years were drawing to a close. Daniel's prayer, therefore, is this: "Lord, do not prolong this exile beyond what You have decreed." He is asking that, just as it was announced, the captivity would indeed end after seventy years.

19. Thus Daniel—and we, his spiritual descendants today—are not praying for our suffering to be shortened arbitrarily or for some special exemption. We are not praying for prosperity. Rather, we pray that the Father’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That is what prayer truly is.
20. Verse 18 says, “**We do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy.**” If strict justice were applied, they would die in exile and never even have their bones returned to their homeland. Yet because of God’s great mercy, they are permitted to return after seventy years.
21. So God’s forgiveness is not the cancellation of sin without consequence. It is the completion of the appointed term according to His promise—the exile ending after seventy years. Without that promise—without that defined term—God’s righteous wrath would endure forever. But because He set a limit, extending to “the third and fourth generation,” there is an end. That limit itself is what we call mercy.
22. Jesus said, “**You will not get out until you have paid the very last penny**” (Luke 12:59). And that same Jesus tells the parable of the dishonest steward in Luke 16.
23. There was a steward who received notice of dismissal. “**Give an account of your management, for you can no longer be steward.**” What did he do? He summoned his master’s debtors one by one and had them rewrite their contracts. To the one who owed a hundred measures of oil, he said, “Take your bill and write fifty.” To the one who owed a hundred measures of wheat, he said, “Write eighty.”
24. Now think ahead. One day those debtors must settle their accounts. Yet when that day comes, they are not crushed with fear. Why? Because the promissory note reads fifty. Mine says eighty—not a hundred.
25. From the rich man’s perspective, he ought to receive a hundred measures of oil. Yet the debtor comes confidently with fifty in hand and says, as it were like Daniel, “Here—this is what is written on the note. Receive what is recorded.” Though a hundred might have been due, the master honours what stands written. In the same way, God brings the exile to an end after seventy years, according to what was decreed.
26. To rely on the written bond—that is, on what has been recorded and promised—is to rely upon God’s mercy. It is to stand upon the covenant and to ask that He act according to it. That is Daniel’s prayer.
27. In v. 8, we are told that “the master commended the dishonest steward because he had acted shrewdly.” Who, then, is this steward? He is the One who, though He might justly have pronounced an immeasurable sentence upon an idolatrous people, instead declared, “Write seventy years of Babylonian exile.”
28. The One who fixed that term through the prophet Jeremiah and had it written down is none other than Jesus Christ—the covenant-keeping God, the God of promise, who establishes His decree by law and fulfils it according to what is written. The God who brings His people back after seventy years, just as He said. May you offer Daniel’s kind of prayer to this God.