

Daniel 9a: A Prophet's Prayer

INTRODUCTION

Daniel was a serious prayer warrior. His prayer, recorded in the first part of Daniel 9 is one of the classic prayers of the Bible. As I study this prayer, there are many things which I can learn which can have a serious impact on my life. This period of intense prayer is related to the fact that Daniel believes it is time for the 70 years of captivity to come to an end. Earthshaking events have led him to the conclusion that his people should be free--and yet the captivity continues.¹

THEOLOGICAL TOOLS

In Daniel 9:2 we find that even a prophet needed to study the Bible. Daniel was studying the prophecy of Jeremiah 25. This prophecy had been written the same year that Daniel was taken captive (605 B.C.). Somehow, Daniel had gotten hold of a copy of this book and was now studying it. He saw how it described the punishment of God upon His people due to their sins. He especially noted the prediction that the punishment would include 70 years of captivity in Babylon (Jeremiah 25:11). But then there was good news. At the end of the 70 year period, the king of Babylon would be punished. There would be justice against Babylon for the evil way in which they had brought punishment against Israel (Jeremiah 25:12). As Daniel studied this passage of scripture, he realized that there would be a return from captivity. He believed that the time had come for that return. And so he prayed earnestly that God would make it happen.

For a much more detailed discussion on why Daniel thought this return from captivity should happen at this particular time, see the syllabus discussion on Daniel 10.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHT / PRACTICAL APPLICATION

I am amazed when I read the prayer of Daniel. Here was the man that was faithful to God. Here was the man that was blameless in all of his ways (Daniel 6:4,5). Even his enemies could not find anything wrong with Daniel. Their only hope of finding something wrong was to make something right become illegal (Daniel 6:5). And yet notice how he includes himself with the people of Israel as he talks to God about how

¹For details on the reasoning of Daniel which led him to such a conclusion, study the chapter in this syllabus which deals with Daniel 10. It lays out some of the political issues in much greater detail.

they had sinned. I would have expected him to say something like, "Israel has sinned . . . They have done wrong . . ." But this is not the way he prays. Notice his words:

"We have sinned . . ." (Daniel 9:5)

"Neither have we harkened unto Thy servants the prophets . . .(Daniel 9:6)

". . . we have sinned . . ." (Daniel 9:8)

". . . we have rebelled against [God]" (Daniel 9:9)

". . . we have sinned against [God]" (Daniel 9:11)

". . . yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God . . ." (Daniel 9:13)

". . . we have sinned, we have done wickedly." (Daniel 9:15)

From these statements (and more that are similar) I learn something important about Daniel. He was not aloof from his people. This was not an *Us* versus *Them* situation. All too often, people find fault with the way that others are acting or with the words that others are using. There is an almost fiendish delight in pointing out the sins of others. Somehow, if I can point out where you are doing wrong, it makes me seem like a better person. By pushing you down, I seem to rise a little higher. But it doesn't really work this way. It is not possible for me to reach out and help another person to change from wrongdoing unless I am able to see where I have somehow participated in what is happening.

In a sense, Daniel is using another kind of inclusive reckoning. This time, it does not have to do with time. It has to do with people. He is including himself with the people who are being judged. He is a part of a group.² The group has done wrong. Therefore, he has done wrong. This kind of inclusive reckoning is not called such, or there would be confusion. This kind of reckoning is called CORPORATE IDENTITY. It means that I identify myself with the people of whose group I am a part. To bring it down to my own level, I am an American. America is doing wrong today. Our nation is permitting sin to happen. We are killing unborn babies. We are promoting gay marriages. We are doing all kinds of things. But I should remember to pray about these things in a way that keeps me as a part of the group. It is not a matter of us versus them. We are all in this together.

This is especially true of the church. We cannot stand on the side and make critical comments about the church as if it is somehow distinct from us. We are a part of the church. What our church is doing wrong becomes a matter which requires our own prayers for God to make a difference.

Another thing that I can learn from Daniel's prayer is the source of subject matter. He understood something after studying the Bible (Daniel 9:2). The prayer which follows is directly related to what he had read and pondered. This is how I should pray. My prayers should not just pop up out of thin air, so to speak. They should be rooted in the

²This point was also noted by Keith Mosier in a class presentation given on 5 January 2006. In this presentation, Keith also noted Daniel's humility in interacting with God.

Word of God. As I spend time reading and contemplating the themes in His Word, there will be many things which come to mind as a call to prayer. Prayer and Bible study are not two distinct activities. They should be interrelated. One should lead to the other. And the other should lead back to the one.

I also see that Daniel took this kind of prayer very seriously (Daniel 9:3). He did not merely lie in bed and rattle off a list of wishes or desires. He prayed earnestly. At this time, he even fasted and put on sackcloth (a physical sign of mourning). There are times in life when regular prayer is not enough. Certain extremely serious situations call for more than CASUAL prayer. They call for CAUSUAL prayer. We actually have the chance to CAUSE a different outcome to exist. But this kind of prayer is very serious, very time-consuming, and very vigorous. This kind of prayer changes the person who is praying.

Daniel did not limit his prayer to a statement of the problem and a request for God to act. He started his prayer by mentioning what God had done in the past (Daniel 9:4). He appealed to the character of God as he sought a solution for a problem. He showed his confidence in a God who would act on his behalf by expressing how God had acted on behalf of His people through time. These concepts were repeated throughout the prayer (Daniel 9:7,9,14,15). By recounting the righteous acts of God and by repeating the merits of His character, Daniel was confirming his confidence that God would act on His behalf.

Daniel also had a very clear focus on the reason for making his request. He appealed to God for God's Own sake. (Dan 9:19). He also appealed to God's righteousness (Dan 9:7). In short, when making his requests, Daniel appealed to God for who God is.³ We could learn from His example.

There is power in prayer. When we ask God for something, He is listening and He will do something about it.⁴ Even if His answer is not the answer that we would have expected, we can have confidence that He will do something about the matter.⁵

³Taken from a class presentation by Kathy Graham given on 5 January 2006.

⁴Taken from a class presentation by Maria Lombart given on 8 January 2004.

⁵In a class presentation given on 6 January 2005, Alex Salzman noted that there was a long delay in understanding (from the time Daniel received the vision in Daniel 8). But when God answered (Daniel 9) it was immediate.