
Praying among the Nations

Daniel 9:1-23

Introduction During the Nazi years in Germany, a Lutheran pastor, Dr. Martin Niemoller, stood fast under persecution and imprisonment. Later, he reflected on the Bible, speaking to the National Bible Society. He said:

Let me tell one story of my life of how I can to know what this book is worth. It was on the 2nd of March, in 1938. I had been in prison in Berlin for eight months and had been tried. After the trial I had been taken by the Secret State Police and they had put me in a van, and had brought me to a concentration camp north of Berlin. They took my wallet, they took my wrist watch, they took my wedding ring, and they took my pocket Bible, which I had been allowed to have with me during the days and weeks and months in Berlin prison. This first night I shall never forget, because I didn't sleep for one minute. I didn't find any peace. I was quarrelling with God and blaming Him. I had lost my memory during the very strenuous weeks of the trial. I couldn't remember a single verse from the Book by myself. I was dependent on what was printed. I assure you I should gladly have given not only eight oxen but years of my life if only I could have had that Book. Next morning, when the commandant entered, I asked him, 'Let me have my Bible back.' The man wavered. I was the personal prisoner of the Fuehrer. If he treated me too harshly it might be bad; and if he treated me too well that might be bad also. In the end he turned to the orderly and said, 'Go over to my office and bring the book which is on my desk. It is the Bible; you bring it here.' I had not yet been for twelve hours in the concentration camp and the Book had entered—the Holy Bible—the Book that bears witness and testifies to the One to Whom all power belongs in heaven and earth, even in concentration camp. There the Book was, and there He was with all His strength, with all His comfort, with all I needed.'

How important is the Bible to us?

What would it mean to you to miss...

How do we pray today?

Pondering over God's Word

(v.1-2)

It is 538 BC. Another regime change has occurred. Within the last year, Belshazzar has fallen to the son of Xerxes, Darius. The aging prophet is once again serving in the courts of yet another nation and king. Where do we find him? Pondering over God's Word.

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

Consistently in the Word

Daniel is a man who is consistently in the Word. Just as we have seen him regularly at his prayers, we now find him pouring over the books. He perceives in the books truths that relate to his own situation and that of the exiles.

The books are the Word of God. We know this because one of the books he is reading is the “Word of the Lord to Jeremiah”. Jeremiah is a contemporary. Letters were exchanged between Jeremiah who ministered in Jerusalem until his martyrdom and Ezekiel who served in Babylon. We know from his prayer that he is reading the Pentateuch and the Psalms. He is in the Word and the Word is in him.

Careful with the Word

Where is Daniel reading? Jeremiah 25:7-12.

⁷ Yet you have not listened to me, declares the LORD, that you might provoke me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm. ⁸ “Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, ⁹ behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the LORD, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. ¹⁰ Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding 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. ¹² Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste.

Jeremiah wrote that Israel will be taken into captivity to Babylon and will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years. As Daniel carefully reads the Word, he notices two things that give rise to new hope and joy.

Israel will be in captivity *to the king of Babylon*. Daniel now is not serving under a king of Babylon any more. He is serving under the Persians whose current king is a Mede.

Israel will be in captivity *for seventy years*. Daniel can remember back to 606 BC when he was taken into captivity in the first wave of deportations. It has been 68 years.

Therefore, he can but conclude that Israel's return must begin to take place in the next two years. We have all had the experience of reading a text not only with a growing sense of understanding, but also with a sudden sense of reality for us. I can just see the growing smile on Daniel's face as he comes to understand what the Scriptures are saying and how they are mapping right over his day and hour.

Praying for God's People

(v.3-19)

Encouraged and energized by God's Word, Daniel now turns to praying for God's people. But first, what motivates Daniel's praying? Understanding Jeremiah 29:10-14.

¹⁰ "For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

Daniel is reminded that being in exile he was in a good place and it was a good time. Exile was not the end of the road. The nation had failed. God had moved in aggrieved wrath, leaving the Temple, destroying Jerusalem and sending the ten northern tribes into oblivion and two southern tribes into exile. But God had greater plans. He would bring them back into the land promised them. But that was only a dim reflection, a small shadow, a postcard of the great vistas of an unimaginably magnificent and glorious future. Truly, they could not have dreamed of what God had actually intended in the promises they had.

Acknowledges their Sin

(v.3-15)

But first, before the reconciliation and restoration, there must be confession. So, he acknowledges their sin.

³ Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. ⁴ 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, ⁵ we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ To us, O LORD, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. ⁹ To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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.

Ah, what torment of soul when a conscience is weighted down by the depths of personal and public sin. Here is a holy God who is righteous, just, merciful yet unbending in His Law, His requirements, His judgments. Here is a holy man burdened by the sin, rebellion, disobedience, yes even the flaunting against God. Here is a stubborn, treasonous, unbending, unhumbled people who in spite of the calamity God brings have not turned back to Him nor back to His Word.

The unchanging character of God, guaranteeing the sureness of His Word, His oath, His covenant, His purposes and His rule sends both severe punishments and saving mercies. Even when God has fulfilled all that He said He would do, they would not entreat the Lord nor turn from their iniquity nor seek insight by the Word. Now this people need the redeeming intervention by God like the deliverance from Egypt. So in a repentance from sin and return to the land, a quiet echo of what a greater forgiveness brings in a much later day.

The people not only rebelled, disobeyed and transgressed against God, but they refused to hear and heed the warnings God sent them. He defined and described the judgments that would He would send upon them, even in His wrath. He sent the prophets to warn them as the nation sunk ever greater into depravity and decadence. They stubbornly and proudly refused to listen. All this was predicted by Moses in the closing days of his leadership. Listen to portions of Deuteronomy 28:45-65.

⁴⁵ "All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you till you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you. ⁴⁶ They shall be a sign and a wonder against you and your offspring forever. ⁴⁷ Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, ⁴⁸ therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you. ⁴⁹ The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, ⁵⁰ a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young. ⁵¹ It shall eat the offspring of your cattle and the fruit of your ground, until you are destroyed; it also shall not leave you grain, wine, or oil, the increase of your herds or the young of your flock, until they have caused you to perish. ...

⁵⁸ "If you are not careful to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, the LORD your God, ⁵⁹ then the LORD will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions, afflictions severe and lasting, and sicknesses grievous and lasting. ⁶⁰ And he will bring upon you again all the diseases of Egypt, of which you were afraid, and they shall cling to you. ⁶¹ Every sickness also and every affliction that is not recorded in the book of this law, the LORD will bring upon you, until you are destroyed. ⁶² Whereas you were as numerous as the stars of heaven, you shall be left few in number, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God. ⁶³ And as the LORD took delight in do-

ing you good and multiplying you, so the LORD will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

⁶⁴ "And the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. ⁶⁵ And among these nations you shall find no respite, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot, but the LORD will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul.

What awful calamities were foretold! What terrible punishments had fallen! But, what a sweet song torn from a sin grieved heart! Observing what Daniel does here, we find what God's truly repentant people do. They intertwine in their repentance and praying, confessing the holy character of God and willful evil of their conduct.

THEY ASSUME THE PLACE OF A PENITENT PETITIONER WITH HUMILITY. Sack cloth, ashes, pursuing God, pleas for mercy – all words whose realities are distant from our often impenitent hearts. The truly repentant come to the throne as humbled petitioners pleading for, yes, the sure mercies of Christ.

THEY AFFIRM THE CHARACTER OF GOD WITH REVERENTIAL FEAR. The truly repentant bow before a God whose character will be expressed in His actions. Not with craven fear, but with reverential awe, they come agreeing with all that God says of Himself. They put away carnal casualness and fleshly familiarity, coming to bow before the high King as a supplicating servant and repentant son.

THEY ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR SINS AGAINST THE WILL OF GOD WITH SHAME. Too often we are as brazen in our confessions of our sin as we are in the commitment of them. Biblically informed guilt by the Spirit in our conscience produces shame. We do not and will not repent of what we are not ashamed of. Is it right to be embarrassed in the presence of God? Yes. But not to wallow there but to wait there as the merciful forgiveness granted by God washes away our guilt and its shame.

THEY APPROVE OF WHAT GOD HAS DONE IN RESPONSE TO THEIR SIN WITH SUBMISSION. True repentance consents to God's work in dealing with their sin. For God's people in the Old Covenant, this meant understanding that their sins were being stored up and held on account for a judicial act in the future. For God's people in the New Covenant, we look back to the cross and confess that God's punishment of Christ as our substitute is all we need. The cross is how God has dealt with our sin – the truly repentant embrace that with a heart that bows to God.

THEY ACCEPT THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THEIR SIN WITH MEEKNESS. Repentant people recognize that sinful choices have consequences. Some are natural and built into God's world. Some are imposed by the chastening hand of God. Rejecting the consequences is a symptom of folly and a lack of repentance. Daniel models for us both acceptance of the consequences and consternation over their resistance. So God's people meekly and quietly accept what God

allows and what God brings. Lest they merely become stoic, they pursue God with a holy intentionality in the midst of it.

THEY APPEAL TO THE WORD OF GOD WITH JOYFUL CONFIDENCE. God's repentant people define themselves, describe their situations and respond to God according to what the Bible says. They are not guided by feelings – they are grounded by faith. Over and over again, Daniel quotes and alludes to texts all over the Old Testament. To the Bible a repentant people turn with glad assurance. There they find all they need even for confessing and forsaking sin as a being transformed people.

The last sentence (v.15) illuminates our very great need.

WE NEED FRESH APPLICATIONS OF GOD'S REDEMPTION TO OUR SOULS. The reference to Egypt here is a redemptive/deliverance word. God had redeemed them from out of Egypt. So God's repentant people go back once again to the gospel, to hear it, to heed it and to apply it anew to our sin weary souls.

WE NEED GREAT AFFIRMATIONS OF GOD'S REPUTATION IN OUR WORLD. God has made a name for Himself. Sometimes God's name is His character. Sometimes God's name is His fame, His reputation. So, we need then to be sure that where our sin has marred His name, our repentance is such that it upholds His fame.

May God grant that we will repent over our own sin and as saints move forward in His mercy and forgiveness.

Appeals to God's Mercy

(v.16-19)

¹⁶ "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. 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. 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. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. ¹⁹ 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."

Daniel's prayer is poignant with appeals to God's mercy. He begs for God to turn away His wrath from His people, His city, His nation. He calls on God to uphold His promises and His reputation among the nations. He seeks the smile of God and the favor of God, not because they are anything but because God is everything.

It is noteworthy that we are listening to the prayer of an Old Covenant believer. Hebrews tells us that they did not yet have their consciences washed with pure water. Therefore they were under the burden of not only the guilt of their sin, but also its punishment. This is clearly reflected even in the most godly of Old Covenant praying. New Covenant praying should ever recognize our vulnerability to being punished and ever rejoice that Jesus has carried it for us.

It is just the opposite of the way many are taught to pray today. “Christians” today are so infused with a self-worth, self-esteem mentality that grounds the way they approach everything including prayer. There is often a tone that it seems to me has to be abhorrent to God, particularly when sin is being addressed.

Profiting by God's Messenger (v.20-23)

What a wonderful thing to see God’s un-delayed answer to Daniel’s praying.

Answer in Motion (v.20-21)

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, ²¹ while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice.

See it? “While I was speaking...” Twice Daniel exults in the speedy response to his pleading prayers. God is on the move. He sends his messenger, Gabriel. So early evening at the usual time of the evening sacrifice, swift flight, Gabriel arrives from the throne of God in.

Affirmation in Message (v.22-23)

²² He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, “O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. ²³ At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision.

Wonder how many times we miss God’s answer to prayer because it does not come to us in the way we expect? In answer to a confession of sin, a plea for forgiveness and deliverance, Gabriel is sent to give further insight and understanding into God’s Word.

So we ask for something from the Lord. We want financial supply, physical healing, a changed situation. So God answers. But He answers by taking us deeper into His Word and giving us greater understanding and wisdom. So, then, are you content with that as the answer to your praying?

Through Gabriel, God encourages Daniel. Amazing isn’t it? This word directly from the throne through a messenger whose flight is swift, “You are greatly loved.” Sweet, sweet assurances that flood the aged soul of the prophet. For us, as we contemplate the cross and Christ’s great work for us in His death and resurrection – behold the love of God for unworthy people!

Reflect and Respond

We cannot confess one another's sins. We are not earthly priests. Each person must acknowledge their own sin. Criticism and gossip are often little more than confessing someone else's sins. But we can bear one another's burdens. So what we ought not do, we must avoid. What we can do, we should attempt as much as we are able. Where a person is carrying a burden of weight, sin, failure, futility, consequences – enter the yoke with them and help them.

How should we come as Christians to deal with our sins? According to 1 John 1:9, we deal with our sins with a true confession receiving forgiveness and being cleansed from all unrighteousness. What should you do in a true confession of sin?

Assume the place of penitent petitioner with humility.

Affirm the character of God with reverential fear.

Acknowledge sins against the will of God with shame.

Approve of what God has done in response to sin with submission.

Accept the consequences for sin with meekness.

Appeal to the Word of God with joyful confidence.

God has plans for us beyond our present exile. Remember that we are in exile as 1 Peter tells us. We are away from the homeland. But this will not last forever. The unimaginable fulfillment of God's promises in Christ will yet unfold. There may be much trouble and turmoil first, but afterward, glory, glory, glory.

Notes