

Praying With The Prayers Of The Bible:

The Prayer of National Confession: Daniel 9:5, 'We have sinned and done wrong ... turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances.'

In this chapter the prophet Daniel, an exile in Babylon, prays one of the Bible's truly great prayers of national repentance. Knowing that Judah and Jerusalem had fallen to the enemy and that seventy years of exile lay ahead (v.2), Daniel set himself to seek God on behalf of his own people. With fasting and sackcloth and ashes (v.3) he turned to God in fervent prayer. Our nation, wherever we live, is in need of intercessors like Daniel. His praying has much to teach us.

For Daniel, prayer was a daily habit. Earlier, in chapter six, we read the well-known story of how he was thrown into the lions' den. This happened because nothing could stop him having his daily devotions! When King Darius decreed that no one in the land should pray to any god except him for 30 days, Daniel ignored the order. As he had always done, he opened his window facing Jerusalem and prayed three times ever day. For this disobedience he was sent to the lions den. So here in chapter 9 the great prayer of national intercession is prayed by a man whose prayer life is sustained by daily devotion.

We also see that Daniel knew the character of his God. He is great and awesome, keeping covenant and steadfast love (v.4). To him belongs righteousness, mercy and forgiveness (vv.7, 9); He confirms his word (v.12) and He is the Lord who brought his people out of Egyptian slavery (v.15). Across the years, even in exile, Daniel's consistent prayer life has revealed to him Who God is. With this confession of his glory and majesty and power is the glad acknowledgement of a personal God. Note 'the Lord my God' (v.4); five times 'the Lord our God' (vv. 9, 10, 13, 14, 15,); 'my God' (v.19).

Daniel's knowledge of the one, true God is matched by his love of God's people, his own nation. He identifies himself with his people, facing national judgement because they have forsaken the Lord. 'We have sinned and done wrong' (v.5). 'We have not listened to Thy servants the prophets'(v.6). 'To us, O Lord, belongs confusion of face' (v.8). 'We do not present our supplications before Thee on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of Thy great mercy' (v.18). Daniel makes himself confessor and spokesman and intercessor for his whole nation.

It is not surprising that this great prayer of intercession, grounding its confidence in God, received a speedy answer. Even while Daniel prayed, the angel Gabriel was sent to him with a message from God (vv.20-23). What an encouragement for all of us to become intercessors for the nation!

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