

Session 4

February 14, 2021

MAINTAINING FOCUS ON GOD

Daniel 9:1-7,17-19

Daniel the prophet was a young man when Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem, beginning the long years of Babylonian captivity. Carried off with the brightest and best to Babylon, Daniel and his friends rose to prominence by serving faithfully in the king's court without compromising their dedication to the King of Kings (see Dan. 1:8). Now as an old man, the faithful prophet of God turns his attention to God's people, to God's holy city, and to God's promise to bring His people home.

In Daniel 9, the prophet once again "turned his face unto the Lord God" in supplication. In his prayer, the prophet of God reminds us that even in the midst of long and difficult days, we can keep our focus on Him.

Daniel's preparation (vv. 1-3). Praying was nothing new to Daniel. After all, the infraction that sent him to the lions' den in chapter 6 was his unwavering devotion to daily prayer (Dan. 6:10), which was his custom. But here, the specific prayer was prompted by Daniel's study of God's word—specifically Jeremiah—that indicated the Babylonian captivity (in which he had always been a part) would last 70 years (for example, see Jer. 25:11 and 29:10). More significantly, based on Daniel's own reckoning, that 70 years was about to wrap up! Prompted by God's word, Daniel prepared to speak with God. His personal preparation involved giving God his undivided *attention*; speaking to Him through *pleadings and petitions*; *fasting* from food and other outside distractions; and *humbling himself* with the traditional display of wearing sackcloth and streaking his head and face with ashes (v. 3). For reflection: *How often do we allow the reading of God's word to prompt us to pray for the fulfillment of it, whether good or bad?*

Daniel's contrition (vv. 4-7). Have you ever said the same thing in six different ways, just to get your point across? That's how I view verses 5 and 6. After acknowledging the greatness of God (v. 4), Daniel made a confession on behalf of his people. These common expressions of sinfulness do have shades of meaning:

- *Sinned*: missed the mark
- *Done wrong*: committed crooked deeds
- *Acted wickedly*: done evil things
- *Rebelled*: defied authority
- *Turned away*: departed from; avoided
- *Have not listened*: refused to hear or to heed

Beyond this, two emphases are present. First, the people *knew* the commands and ordinances of God, and *understood* the role of God's prophets. Second, these confessions are all in the past tense. The people had been sinning against God and rebelling against His law *for generations!*

Daniel then admits that while God deserves righteousness from His people, His people can offer nothing but public shame and mourning. Furthermore, all are guilty, from the holy city to the land of Judah, to the entire nation...and beyond. Wherever God's people were dispersed, they

owed Him contrition and repentance (v. 7). For reflection: *We are pretty good at confessing our own sin while pointing out the sin of others. But how much time do we spend in “national” confession? Notice what Isaiah declared in Is. 6:5.*

Daniel’s passion (vv. 17-19). These verses reveal another key to staying focused on God: passion. When Jacob wrestled with the Lord (see Gen. 32:22 ff), he refused to release Him until God blessed him. With much the same passion, Daniel pointed out the ruins left in Israel over the previous seventy years, and begged God to remember His promise and allow His people to return. The series of exclamations in verse 19 are indeed imperatives in the Hebrew; demands issued by the prophet, not out of anger or arrogance, but rather out of respect for the righteous character of God. For reflection: *At what point do we have the authority to demand that God answer prayer? At what point do we cross the line and become insubordinate?*