

Daniel on Behalf of Israel



The Ministry of Intercession (Part 3)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again today, as we continue with our theme for the week, "The Ministry of Intercession."

In my two previous talks this week, I took examples of this ministry of intercession from the lives of two great servants of God: Abraham and Moses. Certain features emerged which are characteristic among men and women who have mastered this art of intercession. For example, intimacy with God and then, boldness in addressing God and then, conviction of God's absolute justice, both to judge the wicked and to spare the righteous; and concern for God's glory. Conversely, a disregard for the personal interests and ambition.

Now, for my talk today I'm going to turn to another great servant of God, Daniel. The incident that I'm going to speak about is found in the 9th chapter of Daniel, but first I want to look at something that took place in the 6th chapter of Daniel. I want you to see the background of Daniel's habit of prayer. Some things don't just come automatically, at a moment's notice. There are things in our lives that have to be carefully cultivated by the right habits. And Daniel was a man who had cultivated the habit of prayer. At this particular point in his career he was, as it were, the prime minister of the Persian Empire. But the men under him were jealous of him and they tried to get him put out of his position. They couldn't find anything to criticize the way he handled his job, so eventually they knew the only way they could get at him was on the basis of his religion. So they persuaded the emperor of Persia to pass a law that for 30 says no one was to pray in that empire except to the emperor. Now of course, for Daniel as an orthodox conforming Jew, that was an impossible situation. Daniel always prayed three times every day with his window open toward Jerusalem, and when this new law was passed that made it death to do so, he still went on doing the same. This is what we read in Daniel 6:10:

> 10 Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. (NIV)

I want to pick out some features which I think are significant. First of all, three times a day every day, speaks of persistence. And then that window opened toward Jerusalem speaks of focus to prayer. Daniel is an example of persistent, focused prayer. How important it is that we're persistent and also that we focus our prayers on specific objectives which are in line with the will of God.

Then I want you to see how important prayer was to Daniel. Prayer was so important to him that he would not give it up even if it meant going to the lion's den. And the other thing I want you to see is that Daniel's prayers were so effective, Satan feared Daniel's prayers so much, that he worked to change the laws of the Persian Empire just in order to stop Daniel praying. And I'd like that you and I would ask ourselves, "Do our prayers frighten the devil that much that he wants to change the laws?" Maybe they do.

Now I want to go on to Daniel chapter 9, the particular incident that I want to look at in a little more detail. It says there, in the first three verses, and Daniel is speaking:

> "In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom, in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes." (NIV)

One thing we need to see there is that our great source of understanding and of direction is the scriptures. Daniel was not only a man of regular prayer, but clearly he was a man who regularly read the scriptures; and it's important that always our original and primary source of inspiration and direction and understanding of the will of God should come from the scriptures. Secondly, I want you to see how Daniel responded to the revelation that he found in the scripture. He found there that the desolation of the city of Jerusalem was to last seventy years. As he had a position of influence and authority in the Persian Empire, he had access to the records of the empire and he knew that the seventy years had almost run their course. In other words, it was time for God to restore the Jewish people to Jerusalem and to build up the city of Jerusalem again.

Now some people, when they get a revelation from the scripture, it goes to their heads. The become opinionated and they become superspiritual and they tell everybody how much they've found in the scripture, and they kind of explain God's plans and God's purposes. I don't believe that revelation is given to make us feel superspiritual. I find that Daniel responded to this revelation by appropriate action. He didn't simply say, "Isn't that interesting. God is soon going to restore Jerusalem." He saw that it placed a personal responsibility on him that if it was God's purpose to restore Jerusalem, then it was his duty to move in and associated himself with the purpose of God and commit himself in prayer and in fasting to what God intended to do.

We read that Daniel found in the scriptures that the desolation of Jerusalem was to last seventy years. It's important to ask ourselves, "Where did Daniel find this in the scriptures?"

One scripture where this is clearly stated is Jeremiah chapter 29, verses 10 through 13 of the prophecy of Jeremiah undoubtedly was available to Daniel at that time. We'll read these verses in Jeremiah 29:10-13:

> "This is what the Lord says, 'When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you [that's the Jewish people] and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place [that is, Jerusalem]. For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.'" (NIV)

So there was a clear indication that after seventy years God would begin to restore the Jewish people to Jerusalem and to restore that city itself. But God said, "I'm ready to do it at the end of seventy years but you, my people, are going to have to meet My conditions. You're going to have to call upon Me and pray and when you do pray, I'll listen to you." So Daniel knew that his responsibility was not merely to have an interesting revelation that the time had come to restore Jerusalem but that his responsibility was to fulfill the part of God's people to pray. And God said you're going to have to pray in a special way. You're really going to have to pray. He says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." When you give yourself unreservedly to seeking me and to prayer, then I will respond and do what I've committed myself to do.

Now, Daniel doubtless read those words, "When you seek me with all your heart." How did he respond? Well, he says himself, "I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with Him in prayer and in petition, in fasting, in sackcloth and ashes."

Now, sackcloth and ashes were the recognized marks of mourning in that time. So Daniel, in a sense, became a mourner. He mourned the desolation of Jerusalem. There is a kind of godly mourning which is very close to the heart of God. Jesus said in the sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Isaiah 61:3 says, "God has news for those who mourn in Zion. He will give them the oil of joy for mourning, beauty for ashes, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." That's not self-centered grief, but that's mourning over God's people and the situation of God's city. It's mourning in Zion and Daniel was that kind of a mourner and it meant much to God.

Not only did Daniel mourn and pray, but he also fasted. And this agrees with what I was saying last week that fasting is God's appointed way for us to humble ourselves and to cast ourselves totally upon Him in unreserved commitment to prayer.

Let me go back to that verse in 2 Chronicles 7:14 which I read in my talks last week where God says:

> "...if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." (NIV)

I pointed out that scripturally there is a certain specific way that God has ordained for His people to humble themselves before Him. And that is by fasting. I gave a number of examples from David, from the Day of Atonement, from Ezra and the returning exiles, another example of a company of God's people who met the requirements of God for restoration.

Now I want to show you the kind of prayer that Daniel prayed out of this situation of mourning and fasting and seeking God with all his heart. It's a very important pattern for us. He says, in Daniel 9:4-9:

> "I prayed to Lord my God and confessed: 'O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey His commands, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. 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. 'Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame, the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.'" (NIV)

Notice how the word "we" occurs again and again in that short passage of prayer. Daniel was one of the most righteous men whose lives are recorded in scripture. In fact, there's no actual sin recorded in the life of Daniel. He could have easily taken a self-righteous attitude concerning his fellow Israelites and said, "These are the wicked people. These are the people that deserve your judgment." But he didn't. He identified himself with God's people. He took his place with them and said, "We have sinned, we have failed. Judgment belongs to us."

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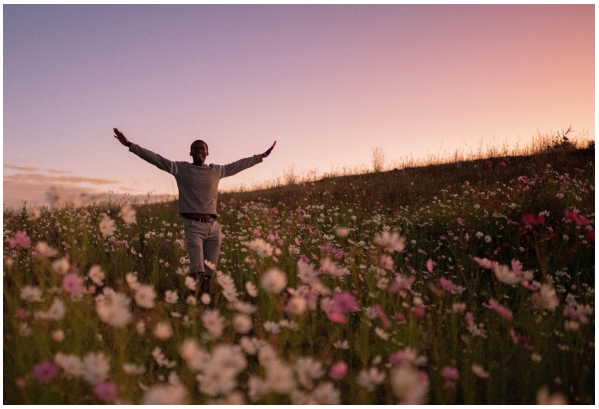

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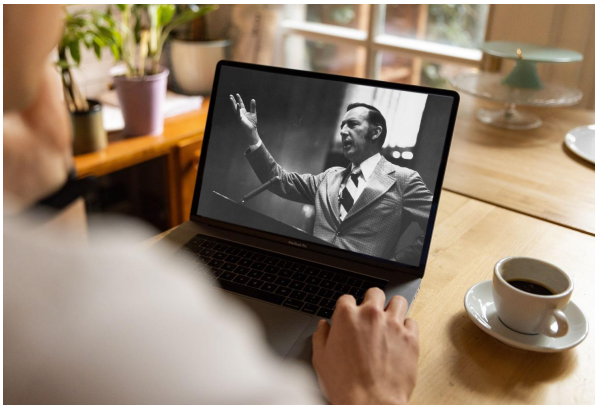

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