

Seeking the Lord in Troubled Times

Daniel 9:1-4

“In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, ‘O Lord, the great and dreadful [awe-inspiring] God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments;” (Daniel 9:1-4)

Does this sound familiar? Things are changing and not for the better. This change makes you cringe. Things you have worked so hard for – your hopes and dreams – seem to be falling apart. Society is in rapid moral decline. The government is changing: the “land of the brave” feels more like the “land of the slave” because your freedom is in jeopardy. Debt is at an all-time high. There are indications that foreign powers are at work against your nation. Your very way of life is in jeopardy. And you really want to know what you could do about it. And the time is short.

The Unmaking of Society

Surely this is the way Jeremiah felt when he wrote the words of Jeremiah 4:23, **“I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light.”** What does that sound like to you? It sounds like the creation account in Genesis 1, right? But it’s not, and that’s what makes it so terrifying. Jeremiah was describing his nation being “unmade.” Everything was in a mess. Their society had become pornographic and violent. The government was declining rapidly due to greed and corruption. Debt was piling up. Foreign powers were at work against them. And why was all this happening? Here was the reason, according to Jeremiah 4:22, **“For my people are foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish [silly] children, and they have no understanding: They are wise [skilled] to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.”** This passage has been described as “the de-creation” – the consequences of Israel’s sin and rebellion.

In context, the prophet was describing the coming invasion by the Babylonians. But you and I have to admit that there are some remarkable parallels to our own nation. The knowledge of the one true God is waning. People are acting silly, making foolish mistakes. They show a great deal of ingenuity in devising ways to sin. But fewer and fewer people know how to do what is good in God’s sight.

Jeremiah foretold that the Chaldeans would decimate Israel and the surrounding nations; but then after 70 years, the Lord would destroy them for their violence (Jeremiah 25:11-12). The prophet Daniel saw the “unmaking” of Babylon with his own eyes; the Medo-Persians had

defeated that Chaldeans. But according to Daniel chapter 9, Daniel understood another prophecy in Jeremiah 29:10-14, about “remaking” rather than “unmaking.” And he began to obey that prophecy. Here is where Daniel becomes a terrific guide for us in our own day.

The Way Back

“For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.” (Jeremiah 29:10-14)

According to Daniel 9:1-4, Daniel understood Jeremiah’s prophecy (that after 70 years, Israel would return to the Promised Land). But just as important, he understood how God would fulfill this promise – by answering the prayers of God’s people. So Daniel prayed. Jeremiah’s prophecy drew on the Lord’s instruction in the Law (see Leviticus 26:40-46 and Deuteronomy 4:27-40). Moses had explained to Israel that if they were captivated with sin they would be sent away as captives to foreign powers. But if they would seek the Lord with all their heart, they would find Him, and He would restore them and remake them.

So Daniel committed himself to call on the Lord. Daniel the prophet believed in the inspired words of Jeremiah the prophet; he believed God’s promise: **“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, says the LORD:”** And he obeyed. Daniel chapter 9 has been described as “the devotional heart” of the book of Daniel. And we can use Daniel’s prayer as a pattern for our own praying in these days.

In an earlier message, we studied 7 important reminders in our Lord’s response to impending evil. Through His example, we learn how face our own difficult times. How did our Lord face wrenching moments of despair? How did He face difficult times?¹ He faced them with fervent prayer.

Prayer in the Book of Daniel

Four kings are named in the book of Daniel: Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Cyrus, and Darius. Each name is listed, and, on occasion, additional information was given. But Daniel 9:1 is “the most detailed reference to any king in the book of Daniel.”ⁱⁱ Daniel’s extended description should cause us to give it careful deliberative thought. **“In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans;”**

The Book of Daniel includes four references to seasons of fervent prayer. In the first episode, the lives of Daniel and his friends were in danger. They gathered in *corporate prayer* (group

prayer) to “**desire mercies of the God of heaven**” (Daniel 2:18-19). The Lord answered, and “**Daniel blessed the God of heaven.**” On another occasion, Daniel faced the threat of death alone. In a foolish decision, the king had decreed that it was “politically incorrect” to pray to anyone but himself for thirty days. How did the man of God respond? “**Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime**” (Daniel 6:10). This shows us the value of consistent *private prayer*. “**Daniel believed in his God**” (Daniel 6:23). The Lord delivered him from the lions’ den. Would you be willing to pray, even if were illegal to do so? Since it is presently legal to do so, would you be willing to pray three times each day as Daniel did?

In the third season of prayer in this book, Daniel was burdened for his nation, Israel. As we shall see, his *intercessory prayer* sprang from his understanding of Biblical prophecy. Daniel helps us to understand the answer to an important question. Since Biblical prophecy is true, what should we do? Daniel’s answer is found in Daniel 9:3: “**And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:**”

There is one more reference to a season of concentrated prayer; it’s in Daniel chapter 10. And once again it was connected with understanding Biblical prophecy. “**In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. ³I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.**” (Daniel 10:2-3) There we see the value of *persistent prayer*.

Applying Daniel’s Guidance Today

What should you and I do when we sense that our society is being “unmade” – dissolving in disobedience? Jeremiah’s prophecy and Daniel’s obedience to that prophecy guide us in what to do.

In a [message delivered on October 7, 2018, Pastor Rodney King](#) explained the importance of praying in our current contextⁱⁱⁱ. The events of these last few days show us just how important it is to pray. It turns out that the authorities had been warned about the man who became the Christmas Day bomber in Nashville. The police had visited his home, and the FBI had asked to interview him and been refused. With all these warning signs, why wasn’t something done? And how many other bombers are there who are even now harboring evil intentions toward their fellow man? Paul wrote to Timothy, “**I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.**” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). The recent riots and the events in Nashville give new meaning to what it means to “lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.”

- Daniel used Scripture to pray. When you just aren’t sure exactly what to pray for, you can always turn to the Scriptures. One thought from God’s Word can be like a fire starter for fervent prayer. This is the way that Daniel used Jeremiah’s prophecy.

- Daniel used prophecies to pray. He had seen the Lord deal with Babylon just as Jeremiah had prophesied. The prophecies were fulfilled literally, and Daniel believed that the prophecy for his people would also be fulfilled literally. From our vantage point here at the end of the age, you and I can see hundreds of prophecies that have been fulfilled. Why not use these fulfilled prophecies for fervent prayer to the God who has shown himself to be faithful?
- Daniel used prayer to get his nation ready for what was next. He believed that God would fulfill His promise through the prayer of His people. None of us knows exactly what will happen next in our nation, but now we know how to get our nation ready: pray! All of the prophets anticipated the leadership of the promised Lord – the Messiah – who would come to the Promised Land. Jesus Christ came, as predicted, to pay the penalty for our sins and rise again (Isaiah 53). Today we pray for we know that He is coming again.
- 1/32 of Your Day

In this New Year of 2021, you can divide each part of your day into 32 parts. If we assume that we get 8 hours of sleep that leaves 16 waking hours in each day. That means that 30 minutes would be 1/32 of your day. Would you be willing to devote 1/32 of your day to follow Daniel's example? Would you pray for your nation, your church, your family and yourself? You could pray for 30 minutes at a time, or you could further subdivide those 30 minutes into three sections of 10 minutes each – morning, afternoon and evening. Now perhaps you might say, "I pray all the time." But we are talking about focused prayer, as Jesus described it in Matthew 6:6, **"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."** Your prayer should be periodic (when you pray), private (shut the door), personal (pray to your Father) and persevering (knowing that the Father will reward you). In this New Year of 2021, when we sense that our society is dissolving in disobedience, could we pray that God would deliver us?

Pastor Gordon Dickson, Calvary Baptist Church, Findlay, Ohio www.cbcbfindlay.org

ⁱ How to Face Difficult Times, a message based on Mark 14:27-42 and Zechariah 13:7. Accessed at <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?sermonid=2214177366>

ⁱⁱ Charles E. McClain, "Daniel's Prayer in Chapter 9," Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal, Volume 09:1 (Fall 2004) p.266p. 267

ⁱⁱⁱ Pray for All Men, accessed at <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=226191250234939>