

Kings and Prophets 17-06-01

This is Thursday, the 1st of June, 2017, and we continue our study in Kings and Prophets. We're working our way relatively quickly, and I say relatively in the full sense of the word, relatively quickly through the book of Daniel, and we're in chapter 9. Let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer and ask His blessing on our study, and then we'll begin. Father, what a privilege it is to gather with believers who share an enthusiasm for the truth of Your Word, for the Lord Jesus Christ, for our position in Him and our relationship with You through Him, and to be able to open Your Word and try to discover its treasures and have a better understanding of its truths.

We pray that Your Holy Spirit will bless us with insight and understanding in both the presentation and the reception so that we will be motivated, strengthened, and encouraged to live our lives in a way that is pleasing in Your sight and glorifies the Lord Jesus. We pray these things in His name, Amen. Well, you remember that the famous events of the book of Daniel in terms of the lion's den, the fiery furnace, and so on, are not really the most prominent when it comes to our personal application, at least not in my opinion.

I don't find myself thrown into lion's dens or fiery furnaces that often, maybe metaphorically, but I don't honestly expect to survive those things in these non-miraculous days. I don't think I'm anywhere near the level of Hananiah and Mishaël and Daniel and Azariah. So what has been fascinating to me as we have made this pass through the book of Daniel is that Daniel himself is such a picture of consistency in his spiritual life, and that is what allowed God to do extraordinary things.

The nature of the extraordinariness may be different, but I think we also can and should live extraordinary lives because we have the opportunity to be consistent the way he was. And so we are looking for clues to his life of consistency, his life of spiritual health, because that has not changed. God is the same God.

Phones are the same phones. And so there's a lot of things you can look at in the book of Daniel. You could spend your life on it.

But the thing that I have been watching for as we go chapter by chapter is not so much the miraculous visions, the miraculous interpretations, or even the substance of the prophecies, which are largely future to us, at least I hope that we're long gone before the awful events of the 70th week and the rise and fall of nations that are surrounding Israel comes to pass. So in chapter 9, as we arrived at this chapter, we said, okay, well, we already saw Nebuchadnezzar with his two visions. He had the big statue with the head of gold and all of that, and then of course he had his own personal little time of tribulation where he ate grass and the dew of heaven fell on him and so on.

And Daniel interpreted his visions, and then Daniel himself, beginning in chapter 7, had visions

that relate to the future of nations. If you look at your Bible, even closed, it contains God's revelation to us, we're certain of that. But of all of the different ways that you can organize your viewpoint of the Bible, one of them is that it reveals God's program for four different groups.

Two big groups, and then one of those groups is subdivided into three. And your big groups are, it reveals God's dealings with the angels and mankind. That's pretty much what we're interested in, right? There is another civilization that exists above, beyond, and outside of us, and we have seen some angelic presences in the book of Daniel.

There is a plan and program and purpose that God is working with, in, and through them. And then there is mankind. When you get to mankind, in the Bible, it is divided into three general groups that have their own opportunities, their own programs from the throne of God.

And this is Israel, and by Israel you can include the ancestors of Israel, the patriarchs. You always say, well, you've got Israel and the church, and I think, well, what about everybody before Jacob? What about those people? Are they just kind of... But they're included. You have your faithful people coming from Adam and Seth and on down through Enoch and Noah and Shem in particular, and then down to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and then you have Israel proper.

But Israel generally subsumes those people into it as well, sort of in prospect. So you have Israel. Secondly, you have not Israel, everybody else, which is the Gentiles.

And the Old Testament concerns itself to a great extent with comparison and contrast of Israel and the goyim, the nations, the Gentiles, the uncircumcised, those who are outside the law and the covenant with God. Then somewhat belatedly, there is a third distinct organizational classification, which is the church. In the Old Testament, you distinguish Israel from the Gentiles.

Beginning with the Lord Jesus and the day of Pentecost, we distinguish the unbelieving world from the church. So you've still got the Gentiles, if you will, who are outside any relationship with God, but instead of being the outsiders and Israel, it's the outsiders and it's the church. So you always have those who are outside faith and any expectation of relationship with God, but it's Israel and the church.

So we've got four different programs that are revealed in Scripture. One of the helpful things when you come to prophetic passages such as this is to figure out, well, who is it for? There are passages that seem to be talking about nations like the King of Tyre, but they are in reality giving us a cloudy but distinguishable view of angelic history. How Lucifer fell, how Satan came to be Satan, and why he is restricted to this earth and given sovereignty over it.

You can never figure that out. If God can put Satan into the pit for a thousand years during the millennial kingdom, well, why didn't He put him in the pit to begin with? Seems like it would have saved a lot of trouble. But God has a program for the angels and it includes, as part of God's purpose, letting Satan roam this world, seeking whom he may devour.

Resist him steadfast in the faith. No Satan, much less to resist. So, angels are one program that God has running.

Israel, with the covenant promises to the fathers, the law of Moses, the suspension of those things, those branches were broken out of God's tree of human history and plan and purpose. They were broken out and other branches were grafted in, and this is the church. Everybody that's never been in the tree, doesn't want to be a part of the tree, is in some other part of the forest.

Those are your Gentiles, your goyim, your non-covenant, and they have the opportunity to come, but there is prophecy related to their fate if they don't. So four groups, angels, Israel, everybody that's outside the fold, and the church. So, where are we here in Daniel chapter 7, 8, and 9? Well, you remember in 7 and 8, it was the goats and the horns and the bears and these animals that represented, at first blush, the coming kingdoms.

After Babylon, you had the Medo-Persians, you had the Greeks, and ultimately the Romans. So, which of those four groups does that primarily look at? The goyim. These goats and bears and lions with wings and standing up like this, these are the nations that will determine the environment in which God's people live.

They have the power, they are the empires, they will take people captive, they will determine laws, they will establish trade, commerce, transportation, dictate what languages, where a lot of people live, what happens, they've got military force, and so on. So they establish the worldly environment in which the people of God are going to function. So God has prophecy that talks about what they are going to do, and in the same way where He says at the end of the millennial kingdom, coming up in year 999, let's say, after Satan has been in the pit for all that time, prophecy says Satan is going to be released for a time.

God is going to let him out, and He has a purpose in it. In the same way, God lets out these Gentile empire nations, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and three of those are actually named in the book of Daniel. We'll see it coming up in chapter 10.

Not only do we have the Medes and the Persians, but He's going to name Greece along with Babylon. So 7 and 8, that was really the focus, was painting that picture, and it was very discouraging to Daniel. Remember, he was depressed because he didn't see the rise and conquest and wonderful fulfillment of promises for the people of God.

We're the people of God. All I'm seeing are these Gentiles running amok. Many times we look around the world and we see people of every godless stripe and ilk running things, making policy, oppressing the rest of us, making it difficult for us to live our lives to please the Lord.

We think, what is up? Is God in His heaven? Why is it that we are hemmed in on every side by so much iniquity and outright evil? Well, looking at the book of Daniel, we realize that even a godly prophet and author of inspired scripture like Daniel got discouraged looking at those very same

conditions. It got him down. He was distressed.

He was driven to his knees in prayer. In chapter 9, the focus shifts to a different group that is going to be the people of God. They're going to be primarily in view for this prophecy.

We're not going to be looking at the Babylonians and the Medes and the Persians and the Greeks and the Romans and whatever comes up afterward in the miry clay and toes of the image. Now this is going to focus on a different one of those four groups I named. It's not the church, it's not the Gentiles, and it's not the angels.

So who does that leave? Israel. Israel. So, in the first year of Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, in the first year I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified in Jeremiah.

So I set my face in verse 3 to the Lord by prayer and supplication. Verse 4, prayed to the Lord, made confession. That confession goes all the way down to verse 15.

We have sinned, we have done wickedly. See that in 15? Then he shifts from confession to supplication. O Lord, according to all your righteousness, I pray, let your anger and your fury be turned away from your holy city, or your city, Jerusalem, your holy mountain, because for our sins and iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem, and your people are reproached to all of those around us.

There are basically three things that happened when Nebuchadnezzar hit Judah. In terms of the judgments of God as a result of all of this sin and iniquity. Three things happened.

One is servitude. They became servile. They were no longer autonomous.

They lost their government. They lost control over their lives, their law, their possessions. That can happen when someone invades and takes over your country.

A lot of European countries saw that in World War II. So, servitude. And we saw last time that this was promised in Deuteronomy.

God said, if you are not tending to your spiritual knitting, this is going to happen. Part of the judgment is going to be that you will be serving outside nations. And that happened beginning with Nebuchadnezzar.

The second of these three things. Servitude is one. The second one is captivity.

They were actually carried out of their land. You think about Poland and Czechoslovakia in World War II. The Germans came in and made everybody servile.

Then they hauled off a lot of the people in there, especially Jews and gypsies and others, took them into captivity and put them in the camps. It's a different thing. Generally, servitude is less onerous than captivity.

But captivity was the second thing. The third thing has a formal name. It is the desolations of Jerusalem.

And in the desolations, this is the defilement of the Temple Mount and the destruction of the Temple itself. Which, again, is a separate thing from the first two. Servitude, captivity, desolations of the city and the Holy Mountain.

So, what does Daniel do about this? Well, we saw last time that he gets on his knees and begins to pray. And we're going to analyze all of the things that he did a little bit later. But quickly, just a couple of things about the way that he prays.

You'll notice that the first thing he did in verse 3, I set my face toward the Lord to make requests by prayer and supplications with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. So, even though, as we've seen, this is sort of a national confession, it is a recognition of all the ways that the nation has gone astray and the people of Israel in general have gone astray. What's the first thing Daniel does? It's personal.

Before he goes to the Lord and says, Oh Lord, I'm in the midst of an evil nation, look at what all these rascals have done. He puts himself in sackcloth. He puts ashes on his own head.

He stops eating his regular meals personally. He takes personal steps to ensure that he is prepared to come before God. He has humility and he has purpose.

What does it mean when you set your face? It uses the same phrase of the Lord Jesus. It says he set his face to go to Jerusalem. The Apostle Paul set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Setting the face is establishing a purpose and then moving toward the accomplishment of that purpose with a plan. So, Daniel is reading the Word of God. He applies the Word of God to his situation and he has a plan and a purpose.

And he begins with himself. He does not call a convention. He doesn't say, let's have a revival.

He doesn't meet with a whole bunch of other people. It's personal. He doesn't say, let's all get in sackcloth and ashes.

It's him personally. Then he prays and made confession. Now what kind of confession is this? What we read in the Scripture is generally, we have sinned, we have committed iniquity and we say he is speaking on behalf of the nation.

But, look at verse 20, while I was speaking, praying and doing what? Confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel. He starts with himself before he starts interceding in the larger context. Another interesting thing is that for the first time in verse 2, Daniel, in the book of Daniel, uses the Tetragrammaton, YHWH, Yahweh.

The personal name of God, the covenant name of God with Israel. The first time it occurs in the book of Daniel is in verse 2 of chapter 9. I understood by the books, and we saw that this is

actually the book, the letter of Jeremiah, and we read that, by the word of the Lord, what he would accomplish. He uses it again in verse 4, I prayed to the Lord my God, Yahweh.

And it occurs, if you want to make a list of the verses, it's verse 2, verse 4, verse 10, verse 13, verse 14 and verse 20. This is such a unique distinction in terms of vocabulary that there are people who say Daniel didn't write chapter 9, somebody else put it in because Daniel never uses Yahweh. Well, it's kind of a circular argument.

How do you know he never uses Yahweh? It looks to me like he uses it all through this chapter. And you say, well, he didn't use it anywhere else, so therefore he couldn't have used it here, so this must be someone else. Well, I don't get that logic.

Why would he use it here? What is he doing? And notice the preponderance in the early part of his prayer. You notice nearly all of those are in the first part. Before, remember I said in 16, he starts the supplication portion? The confession portion, he's using the personal name of God, the covenant name of God.

He is appealing to God's mercy. Look at verse 4. O Lord, great and awesome God who keeps His covenant and mercy. The word mercy there is *kesed*, and you've often heard it said that that means loyal love.

But the loyalty involved in that love, in *kesed*, is related to the idea of duty. I do this because it is right and it is proper and I should. There's not a big emotional component here.

Someone can really get you peeved. I think about police officers who are provoked in the most insane ways. People just egging them, trying to get them to transgress while all of their friends are standing there with cell phones.

Insult them, berate them, do everything possible to get them to react. Why do they not? There is a *kesed* there that has to do with their oath and their pledge and their commitment to protect and serve. And that's the idea of *kesed*.

God will be faithful even when we are faithless because of His loyal love. And it's not just loyalty to us, it's loyalty to His own character. That's the word mercy in verse 4. And that's how Daniel leads off.

Lord, I'm going to appeal to Your righteous commitment to Your promises, to Your own integrity, to the love that You've expressed to the fathers, and so on. Now later on, when you get down to, look at verse 8. Remember this shame of face? Oh Lord, we have really messed up. To us belongs shame of face, to our kings, our princes, our fathers, because we have sinned against You.

To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him. The word mercy there is a different word, and it's plural. It was *kesed* up in verse 4. Here it is *rakam*.

It's from rakam. It's actually rachmim. And you remember when you put im on a lot of nouns in Hebrew, that intensifies them.

It's like the heavens are the shamayim, or the oceans, the great vast seas are the mayim. It's a plural of intensity. And so these are actually God's mercies.

But rakam is a word that is used for a woman's womb. It is used for your guts, your innards. And there is much more of a connotation.

This is the love that parents have for their children, even when their children are in aggravation. But you see the difference? It's not the police officer putting up with unwarranted abuse. There is an emotional element.

There is a soul commitment between a parent and a child. And coming from the word for womb, and of wanting to nurture, of wanting to bring back, of having that concern that keeps you up in the middle of the night for your kids or someone else that you love, that's God's mercies in verse 9. And so he begins by recalling to God, in his prayer, God's past loyal love to Israel, and his commitment to his promises and to his integrity. But by the time he works his way down to verse 9, he says, Lord, we don't deserve it, we haven't earned it, we have earned nothing but the judgments that you have brought upon us.

But to the Lord our God not only belongs chesed love and loyalty and commitment, but rachmim, this visceral desire to bless and not to curse. God does not enjoy judging any more than parents would enjoy disciplining children, or having to very reluctantly enforce the bad side of a promise. Mercy and forgiveness, notice how they are linked together.

If your loved child or loved one will turn, if there is a change in attitude, forgiveness is hard on the heels of that rachm love. Mercy and forgiveness, even though we have rebelled against him, it hasn't tainted God's desire to bless his people. We have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God to walk in his laws, which he set before us.

And that word laws there in verse 10, there's lots of different laws, statutes. Read Psalm 119 for all of the Hebrew synonyms for God's word. But this particular word means instructions.

What is 2 Timothy 3.16, you remember that? All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is what? Profitable for doctrine, for rebuke, for correction and for instruction in righteousness. This word in Hebrew focuses on instruction in righteousness. It's not enough that they have broken God's law and have committed iniquities, but they have not heeded his instructions.

Instruction is on the positive side. This is what you should be doing that's right. So having sort of enumerated and reviewed all of the things they did wrong, he said not only did we do all the wrong things, but we've ignored your instructions on how to do the right.

And it's important to remember that God's word gives us both of those. Here's what not to do and here's what to do. And sometimes the best way to break a bad habit is to substitute a new

one in its place.

My favorite example of that is one that hardly anybody remembers anymore, but when Tully Savalas played Kojak on TV and he wanted to give up smoking, he got those Tootsie Pops, those round things on a stick. And so for most of that series, whenever everybody else would be smoking, he's got this Tootsie Pop in his mouth and you do something different. You can't just sit there with your hands white knuckled on the edge of the table saying, I'm not going to do it, I'm not going to do it.

You find something positive to do. And this is a biblical principle. Turn away from acts that lead to death and turn toward.

It's in Hebrews chapter 6. Change of mind away from dead works and faith toward God, active faith. These are the instructions of God. And so Daniel mentions that and he says, we have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God to walk in his, according to his instructions, walking in a positive direction.

Not just avoiding the miry clay, but walking on the high ground. Which he set before us by his servants, the prophets. There is a means by which God gives us this information.

And God didn't just sit by and say, well, you know, I gave you that stuff on Sinai, you need to go read it. He sends new messengers generation by generation to remind them, to draw them. You know how Jesus said, no man can come to me except the Father draws him? Well, they think that's some sort of a mystical election thing where it's just sleepwalking almost.

It's not that at all. How does God draw people to himself? It's with his truth. It's with his mercy.

It's with his righteousness. How do you draw a child or a pet? You look at them, and you focus on them, and you encourage them, and you want to bring them close by positive means. And this is what God does.

He sent his servants, the prophets. Yes, all Israel has transgressed your law, has departed so as not to obey your voice. Therefore the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, has been poured out on us.

And we read that whole thing last time. So what's going on here? Daniel has analyzed his circumstances, which are dictated by a foreign empire. And he has gone to God in prayer, and he has rehearsed this situation before God.

Daniel knows that God knows all of these iniquities and evils and malfunctions, right? Daniel's not telling God anything God doesn't already know, because that's why the judgments have come. So why does Daniel spend all of this time rehearsing that? He is laying the foundation in confession and in reflecting his understanding to God to turn the corner to supplication, to making requests. Remember Philippians 4.6? Be careful for nothing, the King James said.

Be anxious about nothing, but what? But in everything by prayer and supplication. Did you ever wonder why both of those are in there? Why didn't it just say everything by prayer? Let your requests be made known to God. It's prayer and supplication.

Do you want to know how to do prayer and supplication? Here's your example. I remember when I first started trying to do a resume, I thought, I don't even know what it looks like. So they give you an example, and you change it.

I'm getting ready to do a website for the piano business, and I didn't know what to do, so I pulled one up that was another service business. It's for tutoring. And so I look at that pattern, and then I adapt it for my own needs, but it basically follows that same pattern.

Daniel 9, as wonderful as it is for the 70 weeks, and the Antichrist, and harem-scarem, prophetic enthusiasm, gets overlooked in terms of a terrific model prayer. If you want to do Philippians 4-6, look at Daniel 9. And we'll look at a little bit more of that here in a moment. Because now in 16 and 17, he says, O Lord, according to all your righteousness, which he has just laid out in the preceding 13 or 14 verses, he says, Lord, you were right to judge us.

You were right to send the servitude. You were right to send the captivity, and you were right to send the desolations on your own holy mountain. You were right.

I get that. And the path to restoration is acknowledgement. Confession is, I see what you see, Lord.

I'm singing out of the same hymnal. I'm on the same page with you, O Lord. And reflecting that understanding to God, then gives us ground to turn the corner into supplication.

It's so easy to just supplicate. O God, help. But in everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known.

And that's what he does here. So he says, I pray, let your anger and your fury be turned away from your city, Jerusalem, your holy mountain. Because for our sins and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people are reproached to all those around us.

So now of the three things, of the three categories of judgment that God sent for all of their badness, which one does Daniel pray God will reverse? Remember, there's servitude, there's captivity, and there's desolations. Which one does he aim his supplication at? I just find this very interesting. O Lord, deliver us from our oppressors and the hard task master, yoke of bondage that we have.

We can't keep our own crops. We're taxed to death. We can't go where we want to go and do what we want to do.

We don't have our own government. He doesn't pray that, does he? O Lord, release us from the captivity. You said through Jeremiah that it would be 70 years.

We want to go home. Please let us all go home. Daniel is really, truly on the same page with the Lord God.

Because what is God's primary interest? His own name, his own reputation, his own house. His presence in Israel is what distinguishes them as unique. The place where I have put my name.

The temple that Solomon built to house the presence of God himself. So Daniel, in his supplication, he doesn't say take away the servitude. He doesn't say take away the captivity.

He says, O Lord, can you no longer leave your house and your holy mountain and your capital city desolate? Now what is clever about this, from the point of view of appreciating Daniel, is in order for God's holy mountain to be sanctified and to once again serve its purpose of being a central place of worship and of the center of life, what else has to happen? If you get the desolations reversed, the captivity is going to cease and the servitude will go away. He's really smart. He's given this a lot of thought.

That's why he prayed three times a day. That's why he wouldn't quit even when they passed that silly decree that got him thrown in the lion's den. This is what he was praying about.

You can read all the rest of this, 16 through 19. There's nothing in there about reverse the captivity or take away the servitude. It's all about God's house.

Turn away your fury and your anger from Jerusalem, your holy mountain. Verse 17, hear the prayer of your servant and his supplication, and for the Lord's sake, cause your face to shine on your sanctuary, which is now desolate. He doesn't even say, cause your face to shine on our people, or on our servitude, or on our children.

He says, Lord, it's your house, it's your mountain, it's your sanctuary. Look at verse 18, oh my God, incline your ear and hear, open your eyes and see our desolations, the city which is called by your name. We do not present our supplications before you because of our righteous deeds, but because of your great Rahman, your compassion, your mercies.

Oh Lord, hear. Oh Lord, forgive. Oh Lord, listen and act.

Do not delay for your own sake, my God, for your city and your people are called by your name. And the place of God's name is the temple. And notice in verse 20, we saw that he gave us some details.

He's confessing his own sin, which he, by the way, doesn't choose to include in the written account. He evidently had some personal sins, but that's between him and the Lord, and he didn't share that, he just gave us the national sins. But look at the last part of verse 20.

Presenting my supplication before the Lord, my God, for what? The holy mountain of my God. If your purpose and your heart is for God's will to be done, this is what the Lord Jesus said. If it's your will, let this cup pass.

Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. It's God's interest that is at stake. So let me give you some quick summary principles here.

We'll look at the 70 weeks, which is actually 62 and 7 and 1. We'll look at that next time. But by way of summary and a few points of conclusion here, I would label this in terms of application. How do you claim God's promises in a crisis? You're facing a challenge, there is a difficulty, there is a situation.

We've got a situation here. We've got a problem. Daniel's example here is great for any of us facing a difficulty.

I'll give you just four or five observations that occur to me. First of all, what we saw earlier. In approaching this, Daniel personally prepared.

He looked to himself first. He cleaned his own house. He made sure to look at himself.

How did he do that? Well, in verse 2, he had his nose in the book. He was reading the inspired prophetic book of Jeremiah. And he was studying that thing.

And he was diligent about it. And he was focused on it. And he was looking at it in terms of his own situation and the situation of his people.

So the whole scene begins with Daniel looking at his Bible. He knew Deuteronomy. He knew Jeremiah, chapter 25 and chapter 29.

And you remember that Jeremiah 25, 11 and 12 talks specifically about the desolations of Jerusalem. And that's what's on his mind. So he begins, he is a student of the Word of God.

No question. Secondly, he set his face. He had a purpose and a plan.

And it is spiritually motivated. He didn't say, I'm going to bulk up my biceps. He didn't say, I'm going to get my house clean.

He didn't say, I'm going to get rid of these ne'er-do-wells in my department of the government. He set his face toward the Lord God. And he said, I am going to go and make supplication to God.

But he didn't just drop to his knees and start talking to God. He prepared. It takes time to fast.

I'm going to start fasting right now, okay? Just watch me. I am now fasting. Do you believe me? If Daniel fasted, time went by, right? He missed meals.

Fasting is a process. Daniel, when he had the idea and he set his face to go to the Lord in prayer, he didn't just drop to his knees and go rushing into the throne room. He prepared.

He reallocated his time and his resources in a spiritual direction. Fasting isn't just self-abnegation and self-denial. Fasting is reallocation of time and resources that you normally

spend so that you can focus on your spiritual priorities.

We do this all the time. We move our schedule around to get priority things done. Well, Daniel did this before he went to the Lord.

If we realize there's an issue, we can do this. We can stop and think, well, why don't I prepare? If you were going to go see the president or go see the governor of the state or go see anybody, don't you typically sit down and prepare? Figure out what you're going to say, how you're going to present your argument? Daniel did this. God is omniscient, of course, but Daniel composes his argument ahead of time.

Then he goes to the Lord. He read Deuteronomy. He read Jeremiah.

He thought about history. He mused. He reflected.

He meditated. He gave this some thought, and he skipped meals to do it. He also did sackcloth and ashes.

Now, what is up with sackcloth and ashes? Has anybody here ever done sackcloth and ashes? I did make myself a suit out of burlap one time, which I think is sackcloth, but it was to have fun. It wasn't to humiliate myself. What's the deal with sackcloth and ashes? Here's my suggestion, because the Bible doesn't say.

People repent in sackcloth and ashes, but here's the thing. If Daniel was Robinson Crusoe and he was stranded on a desert island all by himself, what's the point of sackcloth and ashes? Nobody's going to see you but God, and God sees us fully all the time anyway. Sackcloth and ashes is a signal to other people, isn't it? As soon as you spot somebody with ashes, I remember seeing the Catholics on Ash Wednesday in my grade school.

I was kind of envious because they'd gone somewhere and gotten this special smudge on their forehead, and I thought, well, how come they get a smudge and I don't? But it's a marker. Passively, again, Daniel did not call a convention. He didn't stand up on his window and shout to the huddled masses below.

It is a passive notification to others that you have set your face to a purpose, and if anyone asks you a reason for that purpose and that hope, you can explain it. Daniel, I notice your clothing is ripped and you've got ashes on your head. What's up? Well, let me tell you.

I'm getting ready to go before the Lord and make supplication because I've been reading the book of Jeremiah, and it's time for us to get things right with the Lord. So it is an effective and yet a passive way of letting others know that you've got a spiritual priority that you're observing. That's what sackcloth and ashes does.

It doesn't beat people over the head. It doesn't recruit them to join you, but it lets them know that you've got a special priority at this time. Not a frequent thing, but when it happens, people

in the periphery know.

Right? So he studied the Word of God. He took time and reallocated resources to prepare to go before the Lord. This is a big deal for Daniel to make supplication to God.

Even though he prays three times a day, this is going to be a special set of sessions of prayer. He fasts and does the sackcloth. Then he goes to God and prays, and he leads with confession.

Confession before supplication. Laying out before God our understanding. Lord, I know, or I think I know, what the situation is.

I've thought about your Word. I've applied it to these circumstances. Here is my understanding of why things are the way they are.

Here is my understanding of the cause and effect that currently exists. And we talk that through before the Lord, before we start asking Him for stuff. Right? When Daniel finally does start to make application and supplication, it is in the interest of God and His name and His glory.

Lord, I appeal to you not because we deserve anything, but because we carry your name. And our judgment reflects on you. The desolation of the sanctuary reflects on you.

We are supposed to be here to shine as a light to the Gentiles. We are supposed to be here to draw people to you and to Israel. We've completely messed that up.

But Lord, we are praying now. We understand the cause and effect that brought your judgment, rightfully so, on us. And now can we move back toward that opportunity to represent you on this earth, to have your sanctuary and your holy mountain be a beacon of salvation for the rest of the world.

And so He couches His supplication in terms of God's interest. And that, of course, is a great model. But my last point here is found a little bit further down.

Because Daniel, it's not so much modesty as it just doesn't come up. But while he's speaking, praying and confessing his sin and the sin of the people of Israel, verse 21, Yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly. And there's another possible translation of that.

I don't know if you have a text note or not. But it has to do with wearily being made weary. It looks as though maybe Gabriel comes and he's a little bit bedraggled.

Like he's been through something to get there. It's another way to take the Hebrew here. Not just being caused to fly swiftly, but having been made weary.

Daniel looks at him and says, Wow, you hit some traffic getting here, evidently. That's a possible translation. But He reached me about the time of the evening offering.

And notice, He doesn't just say evening. He says the time of the evening offering. Just hold that thought.

By the way, what's the most significant thing that ever happened at the time of the evening offering? Ever in the history of humanity. When was the Lord Jesus crucified? The time of the evening offering. Deliverance comes.

The revelation of God's grace and salvation comes at the time of the evening offering. And by the way, you've been waiting for that all day. Even Abraham, back when you split the animals and waited all day long and shooed the birds away.

When did God come and walk between the pieces? In the evening. So, we sometimes have to wait. And so He says, He came at the time of the evening and He informed me and talked to me and said, Oh Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand.

At the beginning of your supplications, the command went out. The word went out. As soon as Daniel began his supplications.

Why? For you are greatly beloved. No sooner did you start speaking than I was sent. But notice, it has taken him quite a while to get there.

So, even the angels evidently have to work through obstacles. And you see this again later on in Daniel 10 when you talk about Michael and the Prince of Persia and all that. We'll see that in an upcoming lesson.

But, at the beginning of your supplications, the command went out. But He's just now getting there. We have to wait on God's timing.

Could God have dropped Gabriel on Daniel? Daniel says, Oh Lord, there's Gabriel. Got the answer. Say no more.

It seems to be important to the Lord God for us to do this exercise of prayer and supplication. God does not interrupt that process even though He has already prepared the answer and sent the messenger with the answer at the beginning. He lets Daniel do that whole process.

And look at the wonderful example we have as a result. This chapter wouldn't be here if Gabriel hadn't held up. He was sent at the beginning of the supplication but He doesn't get there until it is well underway and has been going on for some time.

And God will leave us in trial. And even after we begin to pray, we need to stay in prayer until God decides we've prayed enough. It's good for us, evidently.

It's good for Daniel. You are greatly beloved. Why is Daniel greatly beloved? Is he just special in that way? Why is Daniel greatly beloved? He's going to be told this another time.

Oh man, greatly beloved. Why is he greatly beloved? Why was David a man after God's own

heart? Because these things that we have just seen are not a one-off. It wasn't a one-time blast of repentance that never occurred.

Daniel has established this as a pattern of life. He's beloved because he's always this way. This characterizes him.

It is habitual. His spiritual priorities are his priorities. And he's greatly beloved because he's always seeking God.

He's always studying God's Word. He's always in prayer. And it has become a pattern and a habit.

Not just something for crisis management, but it is a way of life for him. And we know this from other things we've seen down through. So these are wonderful observations that can be helpful to us as we face our challenges, as we look at our circumstances and realize that there are forces beyond our control at work.

And it doesn't look like we're necessarily going to prevail and America's not going to become a Christian nation and we're not going to have Jesus and the disciples running the government anytime soon. So what do we do? Let me leave you with one thought, though, that related to this last observation. At the beginning of the supplication, the command went out, isn't there a verse somewhere that says, before they call, I will answer? I looked it up because it's Isaiah 65, 24.

Well, what's our mantra for Bible interpretation? Context, context, context. Go read that section of Isaiah 65. When is it that before they call, I will answer? It's in the new heavens and the new earth.

When Israel is no more oppressed and all of God's people are in the golden venue where the tree of life and the river flows out from under the throne and all the rest of it. That's when, before they call, I will answer. Most of the time, when we call, we need to keep calling.

We need to be consistent. We need to be analytical in our prayer and we need to be patient. God will have already dispatched the solution, but it may be a while before we see it.

Don't lose heart. Once again, Philippians 4, 6. Don't be anxious, but in everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known to God. Remember the next verse? And the peace of God that passes all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds through Christ Jesus.

Daniel is a wonderful Old Testament example of that principle and that way of approaching our Heavenly Father. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for these wonderful truths that you have preserved for us down through the centuries.

We thank you for the example that you have put before us. We thank you that we have a means

of approach through the Lord Jesus who has opened a way into the throne room for us. And even more than any Old Testament saint ever had, we have access to your grace and to your faithfulness through the Lord Jesus.

We pray that we can reflect his glory, that we can shine as lights in the midst of our crooked and perverse generation, so that others will see Christ and be drawn to you through him. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.