

CULTURE SHOCK
When God Shakes Heaven and Earth
Daniel 9 - 10

God is at work in this world in ways that we do not know. God is always working. There are some faithful people in this world who believe and obey God even when they do not KNOW the specific ways in which he is working. Daniel was just such a man. He was torn from his home and his family as a teenager and forced to work as a slave for a godless king who thought that he himself was god. He was unable to go to the temple to worship God (because that godless king had destroyed it!), and he did not have the privilege of freely going to worship with other believers in his day because they were all scattered to the four winds. **Yet, he remained faithful, and God actually used him to shake EARTH and HEAVEN during his years as a slave! I want us to see WHY and HOW God used him in this way in the message today.**

Over the course of this study, I have had some conversations that revealed a mindset that I need to address. Sometimes when we read about a man like Daniel, we put him in a category all by himself and convince ourselves that we could never be like him. We turn him into a SUPER-SAINT! **We don't necessarily doubt that he was a faithful, godly man in his time, but we assume that his story could never be echoed in our own story.** We are WRONG! God allows us to know Daniel's story so that we will be motivated to trust and obey him even when it seems that the odds are all stacked against us. His story can inspire us to not only survive, but to THRIVE in the midst of a faithless culture.

I also want to remind you that the Bible NEVER hides the sins and faults of its central characters. Some of the most embarrassing truths that could be known about God's people are published for the entire world to see. King David (a "man after God's own heart") was an adulterer and a murderer. King Solomon (the wisest man who ever lived) had hundreds of wives and concubines and ended his reign in rebellion and foolishness. Moses (the man who gave us the ten commandments) killed a man. In the N.T., Peter was impulsive and double-minded at times, and the Apostle Paul could be a hothead! The Bible does not give us airbrushed portraits of its heroes. But there are some characters in Scripture that display remarkable CONSISTENCY of character in the midst of some amazingly trying circumstances. Joseph, Joshua, and Daniel are three such examples. They were not perfect, but they were certainly men of faith, honor, and integrity, and they SHOOK the world for God!

I want us to focus today on the SOURCE of Daniel's impact on the world by looking at his remarkable PRAYER LIFE in Daniel 9 and 10. There is so much that we can learn from him in these two chapters. Last week, we learned of the stunning prophecy that Daniel was shown about the "Seventy Sevens" that were going to unfold in future history in great precision. But I want to remind you what preceded that revelation. **Daniel 9:2-3 NLT**

2 During the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, *learned from reading the word of the LORD*, as revealed to Jeremiah the prophet, that Jerusalem must lie desolate for seventy years. 3 So *I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and fasting*. I also wore rough burlap and sprinkled myself with ashes. (*Italics mine*)

Daniel spent regular time in God's Word, and it drove him to his face in humble confession, passionate petition, and intercessory prayer when he began to discern what God was doing. **God's Word was not philosophy to Daniel; it was solid TRUTH that was being revealed in actual history.** And Daniel's heart was regularly driven to spend time in the Word and in prayer even until he was more than 80 years old. This is the first thing that stands out about Daniel to me.

Daniel kept a consistent rhythm in his spiritual life.

One thing that has been obvious throughout our study is that Daniel stayed close to God no matter what else was going on. Whether he was being threatened with death or being forgotten in a corner by kings, Daniel kept up a daily communion with God in his life. *This sort of spiritual rhythm does NOT just happen; it must be PRIORITIZED and PLANNED.* We learned in chapter 6 that Daniel's practice was to "INTERRUPT" his busy schedule 3 TIMES EVERY DAY in order to pray. **This was a vital key to his spiritual impact!** I have a hard time finding 30 minutes to pray in each day. My rhythm often stinks. How about yours? *I think that it was Martin Luther, the leader of the Protestant Movement, who – when asked about how he could find time to pray four hours every day – responded by saying that he had too much to do NOT to pray four hours a day!* **Our perspective is so warped by our misplaced priorities!** We don't have to pray four hours, but should you be praying more consistently than you are? One of the major mentors of my life was Percy Ray; a man noted for his mighty prayer life. Once, he prayed for God to provide food for hundreds of people at Camp Zion when they had no food around to feed them. Percy prayed, and a refrigerated truck broke down right in front of the camp on the highway. The driver came in and called his boss, who told him to get rid of the food before it rotted. It was full of fresh frozen shrimp! Lunch was "on God" that day! God still loves to answer prayers. Just this week, my friend Mike Goolsby got a burden for a homeless man to get an electric wheelchair. He prayed with some friends at church, and within 4 hours, the need was met. God is faithful; so PRAY!

I also noticed that Daniel's daily schedule was built around temple sacrifices that were no longer practiced! **Daniel 9:21 NLT**

21 *As I was praying, Gabriel, whom I had seen in the earlier vision, came swiftly to me at the time of the evening sacrifice.*

Now, this may not seem like a significant detail to you, but I think that it is very revealing. *The morning and evening sacrifices that used to be a daily practice in the*

temple had not been done for almost 60 years when Daniel made this statement, yet Daniel marked the time of God's response to his prayer in accordance with them. Does this strike you as odd? It seems obvious to me that Daniel probably began his day in prayer at the time of the morning sacrifice, and then ended his day with prayer at the time of the evening sacrifice. Daniel kept that routine alive in mind and body by continuing to mark his days according to that heavenly reality, and it served as a testimony of faith to his people and to his enemies. I sometimes wonder how many of us would continue to set aside SUNDAY as a day of worship and rest if we were wrenched out of our comfortable lifestyles and forced to live in a hostile pagan world. Truly, are we even doing that NOW?

We also see in Daniel 9:2-3 (and in many other places in the book) that his DEFAULT MODE was *PRAYER* when he was confronted with problems or threats. We often default to frantic self-effort or panicky pleas to human sources for deliverance when faced with great difficulties. Daniel decided that God would be his sole source of deliverance. In fact, Daniel DEPRIVED himself of pleasures and of necessities in order to focus his heart in prayer when needed. But his prayers were not the kind that many of us pray. This is the second key factor in his practical impact on earth.

Daniel denied himself in order to intercede for God's people according to God's will.

"3 So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and fasting. I also wore rough burlap and sprinkled myself with ashes." (Daniel 9:3)

When was the last time that you deprived yourself of food and pleasure in order to seek God's best for someone other than yourself? Daniel demonstrated the heart of a true intercessor. Intercession is the practice of lifting up the needs of others in order to secure the blessings and favor of God on them. It has been described as "pleading on behalf of another before God." **This is not a half-hearted request. Daniel ACHED for God's will to be done and for God's people to be restored. He prayed for his people the way a desperate parent begs God to help and restore a wayward child.** We see evidence of this same thing again in Daniel 10:2, when he says that he "MOURNED and fasted from meat and wine for a full THREE WEEKS" so that he could seek God in prayer. He did not even put on his cologne during those weeks. He did not care how he smelled to people in that time period; he only wanted his prayers to be a pleasing aroma to God!

Daniel's prayers for his people included honest confession about sin: theirs AND his! Daniel spent much time acknowledging the rebellion of God's people against his commands and standards. Daniel did not BLAME God for their troubles; he acknowledged that their troubles were a result of their own wickedness. **And Daniel was more grieved over their SIN than he was over the CONSEQUENCES of their sin.** How rare is that? This is intercession that is built on transparency, humility, and a genuine desire for true holiness. **Daniel 9:4-11 NLT**

4 I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant and keep your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and obey your commands. 5 But we have sinned and done wrong. We have rebelled against you and scorned your commands and regulations. 6 We have refused to listen to your servants the prophets, who spoke on your authority to our kings and princes and ancestors and to all the people of the land. 7 "Lord, you are in the right; but as you see, our faces are covered with shame. This is true of all of us, including the people of Judah and Jerusalem and all Israel, scattered near and far, wherever you have driven us because of our disloyalty to you. 8 O LORD, we and our kings, princes, and ancestors are covered with shame because we have sinned against you. 9 But the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him. 10 We have not obeyed the LORD our God, for we have not followed the instructions he gave us through his servants the prophets. 11 All Israel has disobeyed your instruction and turned away, refusing to listen to your voice. "So now the solemn curses and judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured down on us because of our sin.

Do you see how Daniel IDENTIFIES with his people even to the point of owning their sin as his own? This is not a disingenuous prayer. Daniel is admitting that the spiritual state of his people is something that each true follower of God must own. I get FRUSTRATED in this day and age with the fact that Christians are living lives that dishonor God in so many ways. We take just as many pills, drink just as much alcohol, and view just as much pornography as unbelievers, and yet we feel no shame and refuse to change. Our DIVORCE RATE is the same as the unbelievers. Christians are living sexually immoral lives and even openly living together with others as if they were married without being ashamed of their rebellion. In truth, EACH OF US as followers of Christ should OWN the fact that we are all guilty of some measure of rebellion in our own hearts instead of being angry and self-righteous over it's presence in the lives of other believers! We must not be like the Pharisee that proudly prayed next to a "sinful" tax collector in the temple: **Luke 18:11 NLT**

11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector.

Daniel was admitting that they as a people had failed to obey God. Daniel actually describes how he had been praying just before the angel Gabriel appears to him: **Daniel 9:20 NLT**

20 I went on praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people, pleading with the LORD my God for Jerusalem, his holy mountain.

Daniel struggled with sin just like you and me, and it drove him to cry out for MERCY rather than for JUSTICE. He knew that their only hope was the loving-kindness of God. This is demonstrated by two key phrases/words that Daniel uses when he refers to prayer. The first one is found in Daniel 9:2 when he says that he

“turned to the Lord and pleaded with him.” This word means, **“to search for,”** or **“to TOUCH.”** The other term is found in **Daniel 9:13 NLT**

13 Every curse written against us in the Law of Moses has come true. Yet we have refused to seek mercy from the LORD our God by turning from our sins and recognizing his truth.

The term **“seek mercy”** is the same term that is used by Moses when he was interceding for the people of God after they had worshipped the golden calf in the desert (**Exodus 32:11**). The word means **“to stroke or caress [someone’s face.]”** Amazingly, it also means, **“to be sick or pained.”** Are you confused? Together, they can form the intimate picture of a sick child who reaches up to his mother to touch her face and seek her comfort and help! If you are suffering because of your own sin, God gives you the right to reach out to him in this way for help and healing! But so many will not! Daniel was saying that the people REFUSED to seek mercy from God in this way because of their stubborn sin, but he was choosing to do this for them by way of intercession! This is why his prayer ended with such a dramatic, passionate plea: **Daniel 9:18-19 NLT**

**18 "O my God, lean down and listen to me. Open your eyes and see our despair. See how your city--the city that bears your name--lies in ruins. We make this plea, not because we deserve help, but because of your mercy.
19 "O Lord, hear. O Lord, forgive. O Lord, listen and act! For your own sake, do not delay, O my God, for your people and your city bear your name."**

Isn't that beautiful? Now, I want to finish this message by pointing out to you the way in which God answered Daniel's prayers. Make no mistake; Daniel's prayers WERE answered in a manner that went beyond what we could imagine.

Daniel's prayers brought wisdom to earth and prompted warfare in heaven!

God revealed great truths to Daniel that have blessed and challenged believers for many centuries now on this earth. And God answered Daniel's prayers speedily! On two separate occasions, an angel tells Daniel that God sent him out with a message from heaven AS SOON AS he began praying! He also told Daniel that he was "very precious to God!" On that second occasion, the angel was prevented from getting to Daniel right away. **Daniel 10:12-14 NLT**

**12 Then he said, "Don't be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day you began to pray for understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your request has been heard in heaven. I have come in answer to your prayer.
13 But for twenty-one days the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia blocked my way. Then Michael, one of the archangels, came to help me, and I left him there with the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia. 14 Now I**

am here to explain what will happen to your people in the future, for this vision concerns a time yet to come."

This is a picture of heavenly spiritual warfare over earthly EMPIRES and EVENTS. Daniel is given rare insight into what is going on in the heavenlies when he is praying on this earth. We do not often consider this. We get used to seeing only what is happening on the earth around us, and we do not realize what God is accomplishing in the spirit world to bring about his will. The Apostle Paul reaffirmed this when he taught in Ephesians 6 that there are RANKS of angels and demons, and they are constantly at war with one another. I will never forget reading **Frank Piretti's novel, This Present Darkness**, which featured a fictional view of warfare in heaven. It sparked my imagination about how God's will and our prayers work together! God's messengers always win, but the battle is not without strain and struggle! And we are called to play a part in this battle through our prayers for the fulfillment of God's will! Daniel's prayers were not a useless activity in the light of God's sovereign power. God actually incorporated his prayers into his sovereign plan. Oh, the wisdom and loving-kindness of our heavenly Father to include us in his mighty works! But we do not often see how important our prayers are to these battles. What would have happened if Daniel had chosen to stop praying on day 20? **The most important thing is that he did NOT stop praying until he received an answer.** I find that too often I throw out prayers with a nonchalant attitude that betrays my secret lack of passion! What about you: Are your prayers affecting warfare in heaven as well as bringing God's power and wisdom to bear on this earth?

Daniel maintained a consistent spiritual rhythm in his life, he denied himself pleasures so that he could intercede for others, and his prayers brought wisdom to earth and prompted warfare in heaven. Yet, he was simply a human being just like you and me. **Don't let the enemy lie to you about what God can do through you when you are fully devoted to him.** The "eyes of the Lord [still] roam to and fro throughout the earth looking for those devoted ones on whose behalf he can show himself strong!" Will you be one of the ones on whom his gaze will rest and through whom his power will be revealed? You can be!

Let's pray.