

*“So, Daniel went in and requested of the king that he would give him time, in order that he might declare the interpretation to the king. Then Daniel went to his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, about the matter, in order that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon” (Daniel 2:16-18).*

“Satan laughs at our toilings, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray” (William Cowper). This quote was given to me twenty-eight years ago by one of my colleagues in a Christian school in New York City, where I was a teacher. I have kept this encouraging note within the pages of my Bible. It reminds us that prayer is the greatest weapon in the Christian armory in our fight against the wily foe. Daniel and his friends knew this very well, and I believe that was the secret of their courageous lives. In this week's update, I would like to briefly look at the prayers recorded in the book of Daniel to discover some of the key elements of biblical prayer.

The first mention of prayer in the book is found in 2:16-18. It comes on the heels of a serious death threat to Daniel and his friends. Troubled by dreams he had the night before and had forgotten, king Nebuchadnezzar was anxious to understand one of those dreams. Therefore, he ordered his wise men to interpret it. Unfortunately, they needed to know the dream before they can give an interpretation. Hence, they asked Nebuchadnezzar to tell the dream, and then they would declare the interpretation. The king, however, commanded them to recall the dream and its interpretation. Upon failure to do this, they would be executed. If, however, they are able to declare and interpret the dream, the king promised to shower them with gifts (Dan. 2:4-6). Again, they asked the king to tell the dream, and they would give an interpretation. The king considered their request a way of buying time. Alas, the wise men confessed that the king's request was too difficult. In the end, Nebuchadnezzar became “indignant and very furious and gave orders to destroy all the wise men of Babylon” (Dan. 2:12). When the decree went out for the wise men to be maimed, “they looked for Daniel and his friends to kill them” (Dan. 2:13). When Daniel learned of the impending ruin of the wise men, he asked the head of the executioners the reason for the king's decree. Consequently, the king's commander informed Daniel of the matter. At that point “Daniel went in and requested of the king that he would give him time, in order that he might declare the interpretation to the king” (Dan. 2:16). Without delay, Daniel informed his friends about the impending danger so that they could pray to the God of heaven to seek understanding of the king's dream, which Daniel calls a “mystery” (Dan. 2:18). When Daniel received understanding of the mystery, he turned to God in praise, acknowledging Him as the source of wisdom and power (Dan. 2:19-23).

The second instance of prayer in Daniel is in 6:10. Here, emphasis is placed on Daniel's posture in prayer. We see him “kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and making petition and supplication before his God.” Kneeling in prayer signifies submission to God.

The third prayer registered in the book is extensive (Dan. 9:3-19). On this occasion, Daniel gave his “attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes” (Dan. 9:3). This lengthy prayer consists of two main themes: confession of sin and making supplication (Dan. 9:29).

Some important elements of biblical prayer can be drawn out from the prayers in Daniel. The first element of prayer is the acknowledgement of God's greatness (Dan. 2:20, 23; 9:4). Secondly, biblical prayer includes confession of sin (Dan. 9: 4-20). Biblical prayer also includes the making of supplication (Dan. 9:3, 20). All of these elements of prayer are present in the model prayer of Jesus in Matthew 6:9-13. Of course, this is not the only manner in which we should pray. But if Jesus included these elements in prayer, we would be wise to learn from the Master. May the God of heaven teach us how to think and pray biblically.