

Daniel 9:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

Analysis

The phrase "I set my face unto the Lord God" uses Hebrew idiom for determined, focused seeking. The word sim panim (שִׁמְפָנִים, "set face") indicates resolute intention and persistent pursuit. Daniel's comprehensive approach to seeking God—"by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes"—demonstrates earnest spiritual intensity. "Prayer" (tefillah, תפלה) represents general communion with God, while "supplications" (tachanunim, תפוחנוּנִים) emphasizes specific petitions and humble requests.

The accompanying disciplines—"fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes"—express mourning, repentance, and humiliation before God. Fasting demonstrates dependence on God above physical needs; sackcloth (coarse goat hair worn next to skin) and ashes symbolize grief and repentance. Together these practices indicate Daniel's spiritual urgency and brokenness over Israel's sin and exile. This wasn't mechanical ritual but heartfelt expression of dependence and contrition.

Daniel's intercession was prompted by studying Jeremiah's prophecy of 70 years' exile (v. 2). Rather than passively waiting for prophecy's fulfillment, Daniel actively sought God through prayer, demonstrating that divine sovereignty and human responsibility complement rather than contradict. Prophetic promises require prayerful appropriation. This models intercessory prayer that aligns with God's revealed purposes, asking Him to accomplish what He has promised. Daniel's posture anticipates Christ's high priestly intercession (Hebrews 7:25) and calls believers to persistent, earnest prayer for God's kingdom purposes.

Historical Context

This intercession occurred "in the first year of Darius son of Xerxes" (v. 1), approximately 538 BC, shortly after Babylon's fall to Medo-Persia. Daniel was studying Jeremiah's prophecy (Jeremiah 25:11-12, 29:10) indicating 70 years of exile, which were nearing completion. Rather than assuming automatic fulfillment, Daniel engaged in intense intercession for Israel's restoration. His prayer (vv. 4-19) confesses national sin, acknowledges God's righteousness in judgment, and pleads for mercy based on God's character and covenant promises.

Historical context reveals why Daniel mourned: though Cyrus would soon decree Jewish return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-4), the reality proved disappointing. Few exiles returned initially, opposition was fierce, and restoration proceeded slowly. Daniel's prayer anticipated these challenges, seeking not merely physical return but spiritual renewal. His intercession demonstrates that prophetic fulfillment often involves human participation through prayer, repentance, and obedience rather than passive expectation.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does Daniel's model of earnest, multifaceted seeking of God (prayer, fasting, repentance) challenge superficial approaches to spiritual disciplines?
2. In what ways does understanding that prophetic promises require prayerful appropriation affect your approach to God's revealed purposes?

Interlinear Text

תְּפִלָּה	לְבָקָשׁ	בְּאֵלָהִים	אֶת	יְאַתָּה	הַ
And I set	my face	unto the Lord	God	to seek	by prayer
H5414	H853	H413	H136	H430	H1245
וְתַּפְנִינוּ יָמִים	בְּצָרָם	וְשָׁ�ָרָה	וְאַפְרָה		
and supplications	with fasting	and sackcloth	and ashes		
H8469	H6685	H8242	H665		

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 33:3 (Parallel theme): Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.

Esther 4:16 (Parallel theme): Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.

Ezra 9:5 (References God): And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God,

Ezra 8:21 (References God): Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

Ezra 10:6 (References God): Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away.

Daniel 6:10 (Prayer): 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.

Acts 10:30 (Prayer): And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,

Psalms 35:13 (Prayer): But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom.

Nehemiah 9:1 (Parallel theme): Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them.

Luke 2:37 (Prayer): And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

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