

Daniel 9:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments;

Analysis

Daniel begins his prayer: "I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments." The address "the great and dreadful God" combines reverent awe (recognizing God's transcendent majesty and power) with appropriate fear (acknowledging His holiness and justice). This balanced view prevents both flippant familiarity and paralyzing terror.

The phrase "keeping the covenant and mercy" grounds prayer in God's revealed character. Daniel appeals not to his own merit but to God's covenant faithfulness. The Hebrew *chesed* (חֶסֶד, "mercy") denotes steadfast covenant love—God's loyal commitment to His promises. The condition "to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments" quotes Deuteronomy 7:9, demonstrating Daniel's Scripture-saturated prayer. He recognizes that covenant blessings flow to those who maintain covenant faithfulness.

This opening establishes prayer's proper foundation: approaching God through His revealed character and promises rather than human presumption or works. Daniel doesn't demand or manipulate but appeals to divine mercy grounded in covenant commitment. This models Reformed prayer theology: confidence based on God's promises in Christ, not our worthiness. Christ, the mediator of a better covenant

(Hebrews 8:6), enables believers to approach God's throne with confidence (Hebrews 4:16), appealing to covenant mercy through His blood.

Historical Context

Daniel prayed this around 538 BC, near the end of the seventy-year exile prophesied by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:11-12, 29:10). His study of Jeremiah's prophecy (Daniel 9:2) prompted this prayer, demonstrating how biblical prophecy should drive believers to prayer rather than passive speculation. The exile resulted from covenant violation (2 Chronicles 36:15-21), making Daniel's confession of sin and appeal to covenant mercy appropriate.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Daniel's address combining "great and dreadful" with "covenant and mercy" model balanced understanding of God's character?
2. What does grounding prayer in God's revealed promises rather than human merit teach about proper prayer theology?
3. How does Daniel's Scripture-saturated prayer challenge modern prayer that often lacks biblical content and grounding?

Interlinear Text

וְאֶתְפַּלֵּל הַ	לַיהוָה הַ	אֱלֹהֵי י	וְאֶתִּיד הַ	וְאָמַר הַ	
And I prayed	unto the LORD	my God	and made my confession	and said	
H6419	H3068	H430	H3034	H559	
אֶנִּי א	אֲדֹנָי	הָאֵל ל	הַגָּדוֹל	וְהַנּוֹכַח א	וְלִשְׁמֹר י
O	Lord	God	the great	and dreadful	him and to them that keep
H577	H136	H410	H1419	H3372	H8104
הַבְּרִית	וְהַסֵּד	לְאֹהֲבֵי יו	וְלִשְׁמֹר י		
the covenant	and mercy	to them that love	him and to them that keep		
H1285	H2617	H157	H8104		
מִצְוֹתָיו:					
his commandments					
H4687					

Additional Cross-References

Romans 8:28 (Love): And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Exodus 20:6 (Grace): And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

Deuteronomy 5:10 (Grace): And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

2 Chronicles 7:14 (Prayer): If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Nehemiah 9:32 (Grace): Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day.

Deuteronomy 7:9 (Grace): Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;

1 Kings 8:23 (Grace): And he said, LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart:

Psalms 32:5 (References Lord): I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

Deuteronomy 7:21 (References God): Thou shalt not be affrighted at them: for the LORD thy God is among you, a mighty God and terrible.

Jeremiah 3:13 (References God): Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD.