



Confession Made

Believers can confess their sins knowing God offers forgiveness.

DANIEL 9:4-19

Many of us have a hard time saying “I’m sorry” because we struggle to admit that we are wrong. Apologizing places us in a vulnerable situation because we are confessing our failure to someone. Yet the forgiveness that comes after admitting our mistake can restore a relationship, and it often actually strengthens it.

**In what situations do you find it most difficult to admit you’re wrong?
How can admitting our wrongdoing to someone else actually strengthen the relationship?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

DANIEL 8:1–12:13

During the third year of King Belshazzar’s reign, Daniel had another dream. In this vision, he saw a ram and a goat. Gabriel the angel went to Daniel and explained the dream. The ram (Medo-Persia) was defeated by the goat (Greece). Soon after the victory, Greece was divided into four kingdoms. One of the kingdoms, represented by a little horn (Antiochus Epiphanes), would rise up and oppose God’s people, even desecrating the temple (Dan. 8:1-17).

In 539-538 BC, under Medo-Persian rule, Daniel prayed to the Lord (9:1-19). He realized that Jeremiah’s seventy-year prophecy had been fulfilled (Jer. 25:11-12). Daniel confessed the sins of Israel but appeared to be more concerned with the Lord’s reputation. As he was praying, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and explained that a time period would separate the building of the temple and the coming of the “Anointed One” (Dan. 9:20-27).

In 536 BC, Daniel had a vision about a great conflict. For three weeks he mourned. The angel Gabriel came and assured him, explaining that for three weeks he had attempted to come to Daniel. However, a “prince of Persia” had stopped him. But Michael, the archangel, prevailed so that Gabriel was allowed to go to Daniel (10:1-21).

In chapter 11, Daniel discussed events that took place under the Medes/Persians and Grecian kingdoms. This was a trying time for the Jews. Daniel’s point of emphasis was that God is sovereign. He allowed various kings and kingdoms to rise, and during the reign of various kings He sometimes allowed His people to suffer. But His plans for His creation are restoration and redemption. He will establish an everlasting kingdom. Daniel encouraged believers not to compromise their God-given standards but to stand strong under all forms of opposition from the world.

As you read Daniel 9:4-19, notice the contrast between God and His people. What does the contrast tell us about the need for confession and repentance?

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

CONFESSION MADE (DAN. 9:4-6)

⁴ I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: Ah, Lord—the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps his gracious covenant with those who love him and keep his commands—⁵ we have sinned, done wrong, acted wickedly, rebelled, and turned away from your commands and ordinances. ⁶ We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, leaders, ancestors, and all the people of the land.

VERSE 4

Daniel 9:1-3 provides the context for Daniel’s prayer. In 539 BC, he was reading from the Book of Jeremiah that the exile would last seventy years (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10). For Daniel and some others, the exile had begun in 605 BC, so he realized it might soon end. Consequently, Daniel prayed to God and asked Him to confirm His Word.

Daniel began his prayer with confession. To confess can mean to acknowledge sin. Ezra confessed his sin (Ezra 10:1); Nehemiah confessed the sins of Israel (Neh. 1:6); the children of Israel confessed their sins and worshiped the Lord (Neh. 9:2-3). But confession can also mean that we confess God’s character and attributes. The word translated **confessed** means to “throw oneself down” and portrays Daniel on his face before God.

Daniel acknowledged the Lord as His God. The title **LORD** recognized God as Lord of Daniel’s life and Lord of the world. Daniel could trust God to bring His people home.

The Lord was **the great and awe-inspiring God**. No one stood as great, and all who feared Him held Him in reverent awe. Daniel further described the Lord as a God **who keeps his gracious covenant**. The word *keeps* carries the idea of watching or guarding, emphasizing God’s careful attention to His covenant. The word *gracious* describes His covenant love toward His people. God extended His grace to **those who love him and keep his commands**. They were to love Him, and obedience to His commands demonstrated that love. Jesus also taught His followers to display their love for Him through obedience (John 14:15).

**What was the importance of the way Daniel addressed God?
How did this initial address set the tone for the rest of Daniel's prayer?**

VERSES 5-6

Daniel confessed his sin and the sins of the people of Israel. The verbs Daniel used indicate that he fully acknowledged his and the people's accountability to the Lord. First, they had **sinned** or "missed the mark." They had fallen short of God's righteous standard. Second, they had **done wrong**. This is related to the word *iniquities* and contains the idea of crookedness. Third, they had **acted wickedly**. Fourth, they had **rebelled**. Fifth, they had **turned away** from the Lord and His **commands and ordinances**. Sixth, they had **not listened** to the Lord's servants.

God, on the other hand, had shown His faithfulness in that He graciously sent His **prophets** to His people. The prophets had warned the people of Israel to turn from their wicked ways. However, the nation refused to listen and had turned their backs on the Lord. Though God had remained faithful to Israel, they had rebelled and repeatedly turned away from Him.

**How does confession move a person toward repentance?
Which comes first, repentance or confession? Explain.**

KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation (Repentance)*

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. (See Acts 3:19.)

RIGHTEOUSNESS SEEN (DAN. 9:7-14)

⁷ Lord, righteousness belongs to you, but this day public shame belongs to us: the men of Judah, the residents of Jerusalem, and

all Israel—those who are near and those who are far, in all the countries where you have banished them because of the disloyalty they have shown toward you. ⁸ LORD, public shame belongs to us, our kings, our leaders, and our ancestors, because we have sinned against you. ⁹ Compassion and forgiveness belong to the Lord our God, though we have rebelled against him ¹⁰ and have not obeyed the LORD our God by following his instructions that he set before us through his servants the prophets. ¹¹ All Israel has broken your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. The promised curse written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, has been poured out on us because we have sinned against him. ¹² He has carried out his words that he spoke against us and against our rulers by bringing on us a disaster that is so great that nothing like what has been done to Jerusalem has ever been done under all of heaven. ¹³ Just as it is written in the law of Moses, all this disaster has come on us, yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our iniquities and paying attention to your truth. ¹⁴ So the LORD kept the disaster in mind and brought it on us, for the LORD our God is righteous in all he has done. But we have not obeyed him.

VERSES 7-14

Daniel affirmed God's righteous character as he prayed. In contrast, Judah had not acted righteously. Their unrighteous acts caused them to be taken from their land. They had been shamed and disgraced.

God had made a covenant with Israel, and had provided His law as a means for knowing how to live in covenant with Him. The Lord gave Israel prophets to proclaim the law. Yet the nation had rebelled against the Lord. Deuteronomy 28:15-68 spelled out the curses that would come upon Israel if they did not follow the Lord's principles and precepts. Daniel knew there would be consequences if the people did not follow God's ways. Turning away from Him would bring **disaster**. (See also Deut. 30:18.)

The phrase **kept the disaster in mind and brought it on us** is difficult to understand. It appears that Daniel was conveying the thought that God had not impulsively judged Judah. The Lord had been longsuffering with His judgment. But Judah had not listened, nor had they learned from the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Therefore, God's judgment came upon Judah.

Daniel appealed to God for compassion and forgiveness. The people could receive forgiveness if they turned to God. God works the same way with us today. When we have sinned, we need to acknowledge God’s righteous dealings with us. He has been faithful to us, and any failure lies with us. When we acknowledge how righteously God has dealt with us, it can move us toward repentance—repentance that leads to confessing our sin and experiencing God’s forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

How does God’s compassion and faithfulness to His promises compel people to turn to Him in repentance?

BIBLE SKILL: *Notice repeated words or phrases in a Bible passage.*

Daniel contrasted the people’s sin with God’s righteousness. Read through Daniel 9:4-19 slowly; listing the words Daniel used to describe the people’s sin and list the specific sins he articulated. How does the variety of ways Daniel described sin help us understand the depth of God’s forgiveness?

FORGIVENESS SOUGHT (DAN. 9:15-19)

¹⁵ Now, Lord our God—who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a strong hand and made your name renowned as it is this day—we have sinned, we have acted wickedly. ¹⁶ Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, may your anger and wrath

turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain; for because of our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors, Jerusalem and your people have become an object of ridicule to all those around us. ¹⁷ Therefore, our God, hear the prayer and the petitions of your servant. Make your face shine on your desolate sanctuary for the Lord's sake. ¹⁸ Listen closely, my God, and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations and the city that bears your name. For we are not presenting our petitions before you based on our righteous acts, but based on your abundant compassion. ¹⁹ Lord, hear! Lord, forgive! Lord, listen and act! My God, for your own sake, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your name.

VERSES 15-16

Daniel reminded the Lord that He had kept His covenant with Abraham when He led the children *out of the land of Egypt*. Moreover, the Lord established a great name for Himself in leading the children out of Egypt.

Daniel pleaded with God on the basis of His compassion. He knew the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple came because of the sins of the people. They could not plead their case for restoration based on their own righteousness. Rather, Daniel called on God to bring honor to His own name as he affirmed: ***Jerusalem and your people have become an object of ridicule to all those around us.*** Other nations mocked God's people; even worse, they mocked Israel's God. Daniel did not want that. When the shepherd boy David—who later became Israel's king—fought Goliath, he was angry that Goliath would taunt the armies of the living God (1 Sam. 17:26). He realized God's honor was at stake. David defeated Goliath and brought honor to God's name. Likewise, Daniel recognized God's honor was at stake. He pleaded with God to forgive His people.

How does remembering how God dealt with His people in the past help us approach God with humility and honesty?

VERSES 17-19

Daniel was concerned more about the reputation of the Lord than the restoration of the exiles. Daniel was indeed bothered by Judah's sin, but he was even more concerned with the Lord's righteous acts (v. 16) and Judah's failure to bring honor to the Lord's name. He prayed: *forgive* them *for your own sake*.

Daniel was concerned more about the reputation of the Lord than the restoration of the exiles.

Moses likewise had interceded for the children of Israel. (See Ex. 32:11-14.) The issue for Moses—and for Daniel—was that if the Lord would not restore His people to their land, then what would the surrounding nations think? Perhaps, they would see the Lord as inferior and too weak to overcome His enemies. Yet, that was not the Lord that either Moses or Daniel had come to know.

Throughout his prayer, Daniel affirmed God's holy character and confessed the people's failure. As long as the people lived in exile and the land lay desolate, God's honor suffered. Those who witnessed Israel's plight may have doubted God's ability to restore His people. Because the reputation of God's name was at stake, Daniel urged God to act quickly and decisively.

Daniel recalled God's past compassionate dealings with Israel. He called on God to act graciously yet again, trusting not in the worthiness of the people but in God's compassion. Forgiveness is granted by God as an act of mercy and compassion toward His repentant people.

We can never measure up to God's righteous standard. But God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as sin's perfect sacrifice once and for all (Heb. 9:12-14). When we repent of our sins and place our faith in Jesus, we receive God's salvation and forgiveness (Rom. 10:9-10).

When praying, why is it important for us to focus on God's name and how we bring honor to His name?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Confession is the first step in gaining reconciliation with God.
- Humbly acknowledging God's righteous dealings with His people moves His wayward people to repentance.
- Forgiveness is granted by God as an act of mercy and compassion toward His repentant people.

Ask God to show you areas in which you are failing Him. Confess any areas of your life that the Lord identifies, looking for ways of honoring His name through obedience.

Reflect on the ways God has been gracious to you. Take time to thank Him for His mercy and faithfulness. Share with a friend one way God has been gracious to you.

What can your group do to more readily express God's forgiveness and character? How can you encourage people to come to know the Lord?

PRAYER NEEDS

Dreams: Fakes or Revealed Truth?



By Leon Hyatt, Jr.

Daniel 7:1-14 tells of a God-given dream in which the Lord revealed to Daniel great international events that were going to take place over a long span of years and at the end time. Verse 1 describes Daniel's experience as "a dream with visions in his mind as he was lying in his bed" (Dan. 7:1). That statement reveals a close

relationship between dreams and visions, which makes discussing dreams without also considering visions difficult. The only difference between a God-given dream and a God-given vision is that a dream occurs when the person is asleep, while a vision occurs while the person is fully awake.

False Revelatory Dreams and Fake Dream Interpreters

Many religions of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome taught that their gods sent some people dreams. Their temples provided dream interpreters to explain the meaning of a worshiper's dream. Kings and other rulers retained "magicians" and "wise men," for the same purpose (Gen. 41:8; Dan. 2:2,24).¹ Some interpreters developed "dream books," which provided standard interpretations for events that occurred often in dreams.² By those means,

worshippers hoped to learn solutions to problems, treatments for illnesses, or information about future events.

Especially significant was the practice of “incubation” by worshippers of Asclepius, the Greek god of healing.³ Incubation was a practice by which the worshiper prepared himself with certain ceremonies and then slept overnight in a sacred place in hopes of receiving from the deity a dream that would give him the information he desired.⁴ The supposed revelations obtained during these incubations were vague and confusing.

The Old Testament identified two ways to recognize a false dream interpreter. First, if the interpreter encouraged people to worship other gods, he was false, even if his predictions proved to be true (Deut. 13:1-5). Second, if the interpreter’s predictions did not prove to be true, he was false, even if he spoke in the Lord’s name (18:21-22). The falsehood of dream interpreters devoted to other gods or goddesses also was exposed when the magicians and wise men in Egypt and later in Babylon were unable to explain the meaning of dreams the Lord had sent (Gen. 41:1-36; Dan. 2:1-49).

True Revelatory Dreams and True Dream Interpreters

God used dreams and visions as ways to reveal truths that could not be explained or understood apart from visual observations and audible words. Examples were revelations about future events (Dan. 9:24-25a) or revelations about God’s nature (Isa. 6:1).

Some to whom God gave revelatory dreams were: Abimelech (Gen. 20:1-16); Jacob (28:10-22); Laban (31:24); Joseph, Jacob’s son (37:1-10); Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker (40:1-23); Pharaoh (41:1-36); Solomon (1 Kings 3:4-15); Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:1-45); and Joseph, Mary’s husband (Matt. 1:18-25; 2:13-23). Some to whom God gave revelatory visions were Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:1-28), and John (Rev. 1:9–22:20a).

In some dreams and visions God or an angel appeared and also spoke in plain words. A vivid example is Paul’s dream of a man from Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10). In other dreams and visions, the message was communicated through symbolic dramas (Dan. 7:1-14; Rev. 1:9–22:20a). Some dreams and visions contained symbols that were easily understood, such as Joseph’s dreams of sheaves in the field and of the sun, moon, and eleven

stars (Gen. 37:5-11). Other dreams and visions contained symbols that were explained within the dream or vision. Examples include Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37:11-14). In some God-given dreams and visions, a person could be conversed with, as when Daniel asked for and received an explanation of his vision (7:15-27). Still other dreams contained symbols that were understood only when an interpreter sought and received an explanation from God. Examples include Pharaoh's dream of cows and heads of grain (Gen. 41:25-32) and Nebuchadnezzar's Image Dream (Dan. 2:14-45).

Those examples show that dreams and visions that were sent by God had definite meanings that were not to be guessed at but were to be understood as clearly as revelations He gave by any other method. Even symbols in God-given dreams and visions had specific meanings, not just vague impressions.

Dreams and visions are methods God can use to reveal Himself and His truth even today. Missionaries report that, in some countries that are closed to open proclamation of the gospel, Jesus often appears to people in dreams and opens their minds to learn about Him, when

reaching them by any other means would be impossible. In countries where Christianity and the Bible are widely known, however, God rarely uses a dream or a vision as a means of communicating a message.⁵ In those countries, the Bible is so packed with revelations that came through dreams, visions, history, spiritual insight, and prophetic proclamations that one dream or vision would be minuscule in comparison with the flood of truth that is available by studying the Bible. If a person will study and believe the revelations God already has made available through the Bible, the inspired Scriptures will open the reader's mind to God in a much more powerful way than a dream ever could.

1. John H. Stek, "Dream," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, gen. ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 991-92.

2. Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Dreams," in Edwin M. Yamauchi and Marvin R. Wilson, *Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical and Post-Biblical Antiquity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2017), 577, 579.

3. Ghislaine van der Ploeg, *The Impact of the Roman Empire on the Cult of Asclepius* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 78-80.

4. Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), 106-24. Some scholars speculate that the Book of Isaiah alludes to the practice of incubation: "These people continually anger me to my face...sitting among the graves, spending nights in secret places" (Isa. 65:3,4, CSB).

5. Tom Doyle, *Dreams and Visions: Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012).

This article originally appear in the Winter 2019-20 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Leon Hyatt, Jr., is a retired Louisiana Baptist pastor and missions director, living in Pineville, Louisiana.

COMING **NEXT QUARTER**

1, 2 THESSALONIANS

- Session 1* **Commended** • 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
- Session 2* **Shared** • 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12
- Session 3* **Response Required** • 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20
- Session 4* **Encouraged** • 1 Thessalonians 3:4-13
- Session 5* **Demonstrated** • 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
- Session 6* **Promised** • 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
- Session 7* **Risen!** • Matthew 28:1-10,16-20
- Session 8* **Returning!** • 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
- Session 9* **Living** • 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24
- Session 10* **Enduring** • 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12
- Session 11* **Observing** • 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
- Session 12* **Praying** • 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5
- Session 13* **Waiting** • 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

THESS