

The Book Of Daniel

*And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.
(Daniel 1:20 ESV)*

*but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.
(Daniel 2:28 ESV)*

*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.
(Daniel 12:2–3 ESV)*

A Glimpse Behind The Curtain

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Daniel 10

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Well good morning church! I'd like to invite you to open your Bibles to Daniel 10.

You know, every once in a while someone says to me: "Pastor, it felt like you were looking right at me today. I was trying to sink into my seat, but you just kept coming back to me."

And I will usually say: "I wasn't preaching directly to you, I was just moving my head from side to side so as to include everybody"

But today I actually am looking directly at you – all 7 of you. So if you're feeling the heat this morning that's ok – these are unusual times.

And do you get the sense that there is more going on here than meets the eye? I don't mean that in terms of a conspiracy theory – I mean that in terms of MORE GOING ON BEHIND THE SCENES SPIRITUALLY. Do you get the sense that there is a SPIRITUAL REALITY to this present crisis in the physical realm?

I said to Pastor Levi a few days that I feel like this entire pandemic is, in a sense, a dress rehearsal for things to come. I think that everything we're learning and all the protocols we're enacting will be useful in this crisis to be sure – but they will be indispensable in crises still to come. It's good that we think about how we might deal with a ban on large group gatherings – now to be clear that's not what this is – this is a recommended pause as an expression of our love and concern for our neighbours – but it's not a bad thing to think through how we might deal with a ban on large group gatherings. And it's not a bad thing that we are figuring out better systems for caring for the sick and the senior saints among us - who knows what weight might be placed upon those systems in the future?

So one does sense that there might be MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS to our present trial – and so, AS IT HAPPENS we are in exactly the right passage of Holy Scripture this morning.

The final 3 chapters in Daniel deal with the LAST and LONGEST vision in the book.

The vision itself is found in chapter 11 – but we aren't going to go through it any detail – largely because the vision in chapter 11 is just a further ZOOMED IN VERSION of the vision we already looked at in chapter 8 – which was itself a ZOOMED IN VERSION of the dream we looked at in chapter 2. These multiple tellings of the same story from different vantage points and magnifications is in the Bible to help us become familiar with the paradigm and pattern of antichrist – and we are going to come back to that in a couple of weeks.

So today, we are just going to look at the preamble – we are going to look at the visitation BEFORE the vision because in this visitation we catch a glimpse of all the mysterious and interesting things going ON BEHIND THE CURTAIN.

That's what is going on in Daniel 10. In Daniel 10 it is as though we are being let in BEHIND THE MARIONETTE'S STAGE. You see, the battle down here on earth is like the dancing of so many puppets – and the movements of those puppets will be detailed in chapter 11 – but the real story is what is going on behind the scenes. And that's what we are told here in this most interesting chapter in Holy Scripture.

Now, given the complexity and uniqueness of this text, once again I think it will make sense to work through it first at ground level before zooming out and making some reflections upon this story as a whole.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1:

1 In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a word was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar. And the word was true, and it was a great conflict. And he understood the word and had understanding of the vision.

Now let's pause here and get our bearings. The text says here that this happened in the third year of Cyrus king of Persia – so that means 3 years after the vision of the 70 7s in chapter 9 or roughly 536 BC.

It was a time of DELAY and DIFFICULTY – as God had predicted in the vision of the 70 7s. God had said that under Cyrus the temple would be rebuilt:

“in a troubled time.” (Daniel 9:25 ESV)

Well Daniel is living now in those troubled times.

The edict from Cyrus sending a delegation of Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple was made in 538 BC. Within a year a group of Jews had made their way back to the Holy Land – you can read about that in Ezra 1-4. The foundation of the temple was laid in 536 BC – but then the project was indefinitely delayed because of local opposition.

That was almost certainly what Daniel was fasting, praying and mourning about here.

Why are things so HARD GOD? You said this would happen God! And yet now the plan is DELAYED!!!!

That's what was going in Daniel's heart when he received this encouraging vision.

We jump back into the text at verse 2:

2 In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. 3 I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks. 4 On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris) 5 I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. 6 His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.

Now, of course there is a great deal of discussion around the identity of this heavenly messenger. Some scholars identify him as Gabriel – some even identify him as JESUS! Although as we get further into the story I think that identification will become very unlikely given some of what we are about to be told. Since this messenger isn't named, it is probably best just to understand him as AN EXALTED HEAVENLY BEING. He is dressed like a priest actually – or maybe it would be better to say that the priests in the Bible are dressed like him. Remember, the whole Tabernacle complex – including all the priestly attire – were modelled upon a heavenly blueprint – we've talking about that in the Exodus podcast. The tabernacle priests were modelled on the noble officers of the heavenly court. So this was someone of considerable power and dignity – this was someone who stood and served close to God.

We jump back into the story at verse 7:

7 And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves. 8 So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me. My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. 9 Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground. 10 And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. 11 And he said to me, “O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you.” And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. 12 Then he said to me, “Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. 13 The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to

help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, 14 and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come.”

Now there is a lot going on here – but the big news is that, apparently, God sent this being to Daniel to encourage him but he had to press through demonic opposition and was subsequently DELAYED! That is absolutely fascinating! What does it mean that God’s messengers – and God’s encouragement – can be delayed? Mark that down. We’ll come back to that in just a minute.

For now, let’s just recall WHY this encouragement was sent in the first place. Daniel was discouraged because of the difficulty being faced by those sent to rebuild the temple. Those people were facing INCREDIBLE OBSTACLES and OPPOSITION. Daniel hadn’t expected that – and so God sends him this vision to encourage him – but the vision was FOR DAYS YET TO COME – we see that in verse 14.

And that in itself is interesting. The specific military conflicts being predicted in detail in Daniel 11 lay 370 years in the future – from Daniel’s perspective. So how was something that was not going to happen for 370 years supposed to comfort Daniel in his immediate distress and affliction?

Tremper Longman says helpfully here:

“To know that such a great salvation is coming in spite of the present circumstances cannot help but deeply encourage the godly.”¹

I think that is true.

You see, sometimes just KNOWING that God wins in the end – no matter how far away the end is – is enough to give God’s people courage and endurance in the present. Isn’t that true?

We jump back into the story at verse 15:

15 When he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and was mute. 16 And behold, one in the likeness of the children of man

¹ Tremper Longman III, *Daniel* in the NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 245.

touched my lips. Then I opened my mouth and spoke. I said to him who stood before me, “O my lord, by reason of the vision pains have come upon me, and I retain no strength. 17 How can my lord’s servant talk with my lord? For now no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me.”

18 Again one having the appearance of a man touched me and strengthened me. 19 And he said, “O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage.” And as he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, “Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.” 20 Then he said, “Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come. 21 But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince. (Daniel 10:1–21 ESV)

So here we see that angelic beings – called Princes here - are associated with specific nations. The text refers to the Prince of Persia and the Prince of Greece as adversarial angels – and then the messenger also refers to Michael whom he calls “your Prince” which is to say the Prince assigned to the nation of Israel – or perhaps better, the Prince Assigned to the Covenant People of God.

With that fascinating piece of information chapter 10 comes to a close.

The vision itself carries on and details the rise and reign of the Old Testament antichrist. His end is narrated at the conclusion of chapter 11:

And he shall pitch his palatial tents between the sea and the glorious holy mountain. Yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him. (Daniel 11:45 ESV)

So – just like in chapter 8 – the little horn gets a little leash. He is given permission to oppose the purposes of God and to oppress the people of God – but in the end, his leash is withdrawn, his teeth are pulled and his kingdom thrown down. We’ll look at the end of the matter and the end of the vision in the coming weeks – but for now, I want to reflect in particular upon all that we’ve been told about the wonderful and mysterious goings on BEHIND THE CURTAIN. There is some REMARKABLE CONTENT in Daniel 10 the purpose of which is to instruct and encourage God’s people as they live and serve through troubled times.

I think the first thing we've learned today is this; there are obviously:

1. There are multiple layers and overlapping realities in the conflict between good and evil

Remember Daniel is upset because of the difficulties and setbacks that have been experienced by the delegation that was sent out and funded by Cyrus. Why would this be happening, Daniel wonders? How could this be happening?

How can the PROPHESED PURPOSE OF GOD be facing difficulties?

Well, Daniel is being told that there are multiple factors to consider – some in the human realm and some in the spiritual realm.

And that's helpful for us to remember.

I know as a pastor I sometimes have to remind myself of that. There have been seasons in this church when everything comes really easy. We've had months and years that you would almost want to label as mini-revivals. But then we've had stretches – weeks, months, even years – when it feels like the work is being RESISTED. When it feels like God's purpose here is being opposed.

Do you know what I am talking about?

And because I am a man I immediately look around for someone or something at ground level to blame. Is it my fault? Am I not reading the Bible enough? Am I not praying hard enough? Or is it your fault? Is one of you cheating on his wife? Is one of you no longer paying his taxes? What in the world is going on? And I start pointing fingers in my brain – do you ever catch yourself doing that?

But see, the text is reminding us that the difficulty we are facing at ground level MIGHT actually be the result of something happening BEHIND THE CURTAIN.

Sometimes events at ground level are CONTINGENT unseen, spiritual realities.

That's our first observation.

The second thing I think we need to see here is that:

2. The purpose of God may be delayed but never denied

That's the big insight in the passage – isn't it? God sent a heavenly messenger to encourage Daniel AND HE WAS DELAYED.

How is that even possible?

But apparently it is – the messenger says in verses 12-14:

“Fear not, Daniel, for **from the first day** that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. ¹³ The prince of the kingdom of Persia **withstood me twenty-one days**, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, ¹⁴ and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days.” (Daniel 10:12–14 ESV)

So putting this all together, it appears that on the DAY that Daniel began fasting and praying over this matter an angel was dispatched from the throne room of God to bring encouragement BUT HE WAS DELAYED BY CONFLICT in the spiritual realm for 21 days. In verse 2 Daniel said that he had begun fasting and praying 3 weeks ago.

So this encouragement got hung up in traffic - I'm not even sure what to do with that!

Our sign out front has been delayed by the conflict between the Canadian government and the Aboriginal tribes in British Columbia for 90 days – and now it is further delayed because of everything going on with the coronavirus - but that sort of thing is expected down here. Down here we've got ISSUES and COMPLEXITIES that occasionally gum up the supply chain – but HERE in this chapter - we are being told that the SAME thing can happen in the spiritual realm – can you even wrap your head around that?

Now, that doesn't mean that God's Sovereignty is somehow in question. Sometimes people read this chapter and jump to that conclusion. "Maybe God is not in charge!! Maybe his will can be thwarted!!!"

No.

Let me clear that up, that is not what the text is saying.

D.A. Carson is helpful here. He says:

"But that is to draw a conclusion that Scripture rules out of order. Nebuchadnezzar learned the lesson well: God "does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and with the peoples of the earth" (Daniel 4:35). There is a terrible war going on, but this takes place under God's Sovereignty. ... So there is space for conflict, resolve, perseverance – and for faith and utter confidence."²

What the bible seems to be saying is that God's plan and purpose are resisted in this world – in both the spiritual and physical dimensions of this world – and yet they will certainly and assuredly come to pass.

HOW THEY COME TO PASS and WHEN THEY COME TO PASS is somewhat contingent. Meaning, it depends on the actions of players in both dimensions of this cosmic conflict. But they will come to pass because THE OUTCOME has already been DETERMINED in the throne room of God. Joyce Baldwin says helpfully here, commenting on verse 21:

"Indeed they are already inscribed in his *book of truth*, which, though figurative, aptly conveys God's control and knowledge of past, present and future (Ps. 139:16; Mal. 3:16), for they are officially entered in his records."³

Do you see that?

The outcome has already been officially entered in his records.

² D.A. Carson, *For The Love Of God* Volume 2, October 25th.

³ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 23 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 202.

That's the point!

Listen, let me ask you a question: if you knew that your team was going to win the Superbowl but you would have to sustain a concussion and loose half a dozen teeth – but it would all be for a good cause – and your story would eventually be made into an NFL film – would you or would you not take that deal?

I'd take that deal in heartbeat.

Fighting and bleeding is hard when it could all be for nothing – but here God is saying IT WILL NOT ALL BE FOR NOTHING. Because the victory has already been recorded.

All you've got to do is stay on the field and bleed.

We see the exact same thing in the New Testament. In the Olivet Discourse Jesus says:

“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰ And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:9–14 ESV)

So Jesus traces out the future in broad terms – and what he says sounds a lot like the vision in Daniel chapter 9. He says that the house of God will be rebuilt in TROUBLED TIMES!!!! There will be tribulation, betrayal and deception – but the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to the nations AND THEN THE END WILL COME.

Did you hear that?

The end will not come until the Gospel has been preached to all nations.

Well, when will that be?

And of course, the answer is somewhat contingent upon our efforts and prayers down here – and that leads us to our third observation:

3. There is a relationship between piety and power in prayer

Twice in this text we are told that Daniel was greatly loved by God. In verse 11 and verse 19 we are told that – and we were told that back in chapter 9 too. In Daniel 9:23 the text says:

At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, **for you are greatly loved**. (Daniel 9:23 ESV)

Apparently, not everyone’s prayer received an immediate response from God – but Daniel’s did. And of course it is no accident that all this help from heaven was dispatched WHILE DANIEL WAS FASTING AND PRAYING.

There is a connection between PIETY and POWER IN PRAYER.

Jesus said:

“This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.” (Mark 9:29 NKJV)

You remember that?

James, the brother of Jesus spoke about this connection too. He said:

“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” (James 5:16 NKJV)

So Old Testament and New, there is a connection between personal piety and power in prayer. And there is then a sense in which if we neglect our discipline and if we are lax with respect to holiness then we are going to accomplish less when it comes to our prayer and preaching. So – delay and difficulty in the progress of God’s purposes MAY BE the result of complications in the

spiritual realm or deficiencies in the personal realm. Both are possible – as we've said now multiple times – these conflicts are overlapping.

So God's purposes are sure – the war is already won – the outcome is already written down – and yet sometimes we lose battles we should win we are lax in our discipline and preparedness – that's a principle that is pretty consistently taught in the Bible – Old Testament and New.

Then fourthly and lastly here we need to be careful to notice that:

4. There is a price to be paid for contact with the spiritual realm

As encouraging as this visitation was it was also physically debilitating for brother Daniel. He says in verses 8-9:

My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength.⁹ Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground. (Daniel 10:8–9 ESV)

It took multiple touches from this heavenly messenger just to bring Daniel back from the brink of death. There is a lesson in there for us, friends. Nowhere in the Bible are we told to seek out direct contact with spiritual entities – be they angels or demons. If God sends an angel – then we trust he will also send the help and grace to allow us to survive the shock and trauma of that encounter.

But we are not to seek it out.

We live where we live and if there is to be contact – it must come from heaven to us.

And of course that is just another reminder of the great kindness and condescension of the incarnation. Jesus was the ultimate messenger from heaven, who came down from the very throne of God to do for us what we in our weakness and frailty could not do for ourselves – and to pay for what we had done in his body on the cross.

That's the Gospel – of course. The message that heaven reached out for us – because it had to. Because that is a line that we cannot cross on our own.

Those who think they can are rebuked in Holy Scripture. Peter talks about such people in 2 Peter 2. He says:

Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones,¹¹ whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. (2 Peter 2:10–11 ESV)

Are you hearing that?

Angels are careful in terms of how they deal with other angels. Jude says that even:

“the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment” (Jude 1:9 ESV)

Even Michael – did not directly rebuke the devil – so what in the world are you doing when you start naming and claiming your nonsense in the spiritual realm? All these crazy preachers on the internet and on tv telling you to take authority in the spiritual realm – where in the world are they getting that?

Not in the bible.

And not in this story.

It would be hard to imagine poor, semi-unconscious Daniel thinking that the point of this story was to recruit him to fight alongside Michael and Gabriel in their ongoing battle with the Princes of Persia and Greece.

Daniel is passed out on the floor.

He is not naming and claiming anything. He is just hoping not to die after his brief and terrifying encounter with the unseen realities behind that curtain.

So no; that’s not our realm – and that’s not the right application of this story.

This vision was given to Daniel to encourage him in HIS calling. He's an 80-year-old man. He was too old to go with the first group of returnees who went back to Israel to work on the temple. He was too old to walk and too old to dig – but not too old to pray.

That was Daniel's calling and that remains a big part of our calling as the people of God still today.

Listen, nowhere in the bible are you told to make contact with evil spirits in the heavenly realm. That's not our level. That's not our mission.

Our mission is to bring the Gospel to every tribe, tongue and nation on planet earth.

Our tools are preaching, prayer and love.

What we're being told in this vision is that we need to keep on doing what we're doing. We are not to DESPAIR when we face difficulty and delay. There's going to be some hard times. There will be some delay. There may be the odd pause. That's ok. We were told to expect such things – the temple is always built in TROUBLED TIMES – and yet, because God is Sovereign and because his WILL is ultimately INCONTESTABLE – all things will work TOGETHER FOR GOOD for those who are called according to his purpose – GOD'S GOT A PLAN brothers and sisters and a LOT of that plan is happening behind the scenes.

So man your post. Pray your prayer, give your witness, love your neighbor and do not be afraid; because the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 24:13). Thanks be to God, let's pray together.