

Daniel 10: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Daniel chapter 10. 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.

In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all for the full three weeks. On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, that is the Tigris, I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Euphras around his waist. 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. 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. 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. 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. And behold, a hand touched me, and set me trembling on my hands and knees. 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. 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. 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, 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. When he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground, and was mute. And behold, one in the likeness of the children of man 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. How can my Lord's servant talk with my Lord? For now no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me.

[2 : 3 3] Again one having the appearance of a man touched me and strengthened me. 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. 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. 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 chapter 10 begins the fourth and final vision of the book of Daniel, which runs for three chapters until the end of the book. The first vision was the vision of the four beasts in chapter 7, the second the vision of the ram and the goat in chapter 8, the third the vision of the 70 weeks of years in chapter 9. This is the longest and the most challenging vision of the book, especially with the long sequence of prophesied events of vaguely defined characters in the following chapter. Due in part to the exceptional detail of the prophecies of chapter 11, many commentators have regarded this vision as being prophecy delivered after the fact. However, those who adopt a late date for the book of Daniel have to apply all of the prophecies to events before the end of the second century BC. Either some of the events spoken of at the end of chapter 11 had not yet taken place but were seen on the horizon, or sections like verses 40 to 45 must be related to the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. In either case, we have prophecies that don't fit what actually happened, leading to problems for those who believe that this was included as canonical literature earlier on.

If on the one hand this is prophecy after the fact, describing events in recent history, it seems strange that it would describe events in its own time so inaccurately. If it is mostly prophecy after the fact, but there is prophecy within it that looks to the near future, then it would clearly be proven not to be prophecy shortly afterwards. Either way, we have a problem. It is far more reasonable, I believe, to take this as Christians have historically taken it, as prophecy that looks into the future long distant from its own time, and also far beyond the time of the Maccabees. The prophecy comes in the third year of Cyrus, likely 536 BC. Things will be much clearer now to Daniel. Babylon has fallen, Cyrus has given his decree, many have returned to Judah, and had even started rebuilding the temple. However, as Paul Tanner notes, by this point news had probably reached Daniel of rebuilding efforts having stalled, having faced concerted opposition the people had left off the work. The rest of this chapter describes the context of the delivery of the visionary word, which is related in chapters 11 and 12. These chapters describe the conflicts that frame the period that will follow. Daniel's mourning, described in verses 2 and 3, might have been provoked by dispiriting news from Jerusalem. The re-establishment of the city and its sanctuary had been the subject of the vision of the preceding chapter. The fact that Daniel was mourning during a feast time, during Passover on the feast of unleavened bread, indicates the seriousness of the situation.

Daniel receives the vision by the banks of the river Tigris. He hasn't returned to Jerusalem, he is aged and still in the service of the king. The figure described in verses 5 to 9 should be distinguished from the figure in verse 10 and following. As Tanner observes, the vision here resembles that in Revelation chapter 1, verses 12 to 17.

[6 : 11] Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars. From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead. The close similarity between the figure in Daniel chapter 10 and Christ in Revelation chapter 1 should, I believe, lead us to identify the two. Daniel does not have the same response to Gabriel as he had to this figure, strongly weighing against the identification that some have made between Gabriel and the man dressed in linen. Tanner also recognises similarities between Daniel's response to the vision and Saul of Tarsus' response to his vision on the road to Damascus in Acts, where Saul sees the vision and falls to the ground, whereas those with him do not, although they do see a great light. Daniel's companions here have a response of terror and flee, but they do not see the vision.

They experience dread in response to they know not what. The figure that Daniel sees is clothed like a high priest, but is glorious like no human high priest is. He has a metallic and radiant appearance, recalling the terrifying image of chapter 2 and Nebuchadnezzar's first dream. This is the reality of which the earthly high priest was merely a pale reflection. His linen garments, as James Jordan argues, should be associated with the garments worn by the high priest on the Day of Atonement.

We should here recall the vision of the 70 weeks. This is the great high priestly figure who will fulfil what the prophecy declared would come to pass in chapter 9 verse 24.

Daniel won't see the prophecy fulfilled, but he does get to see the glorious one who will fulfil it.

The description of the figure here would also recall the throne chariot vision of Ezekiel chapter 1. This is the awaited figure, none other than Michael himself, the great prince of the covenant.

[8 : 45] He is also the angel of the covenant, or the angel of the Lord, who appeared in the burning bush, who led Israel through the wilderness and into the promised land, and who is also mentioned in such places, Zachariah chapter 3. Daniel is so overcome by the vision that he enters into a sort of death-like state, or deep sleep, much as Adam was placed into a deep sleep when Eve was taken from his side, and Abraham was placed into a deep sleep when he saw the vision of Genesis chapter 15.

Daniel is raised up with a touch and a word. The figure who does this is not the glorious man he has just seen, but an interpreting angel, namely Gabriel, whom he has seen in the earlier visions.

In chapter 8 verse 16, Gabriel had been charged to instruct Daniel concerning the vision. In chapter 9 verse 21, Gabriel was sent with a message to Daniel. There we are told that it was the one that he had seen in the vision at the first, which might be a reference to chapter 7 verse 16, when Daniel approaches one of the standing figures, who interprets the vision for him.

Gabriel, it would seem, has been the interpreting angel for Daniel throughout. He will appear again in the Annunciation narratives in the story of Jesus' nativity. Gabriel declares that Daniel is greatly loved, much as in chapter 9 verse 23, and Daniel is made to stand up, trembling. Much as in the preceding chapter, Daniel received this vision in response to his diligent seeking of the Lord.

The Lord heard him and responded. Gabriel was resisted by the prince of the kingdom of Persia, for 21 days. The world was under angelic governance, and the prince of the kingdom of Persia here should be understood to be an angelic figure. Israel also has its prince, not a human figure, but a glorious heavenly figure, Michael. Nations were ruled by angelic powers, which were connected with the gods of those nations. Gabriel, as Jordan notes, seems to be responsible not just for a particular kingdom, but also for the region of the empires, struggling with both Persia and later with Greece. He must subdue the evil angelic rulers of those kingdoms, placing them under the Lord's dominion for a time.

[10 : 56] This struggle was keener during the time of Cyrus' absence, as Cambyses, who was ruling during that period, was not favourable to the Jews in the way that Cyrus was. The 21 days of the kingdom of Persia's withstanding naturally recalls the three weeks of Daniel's fast at the beginning of the chapter.

Daniel will be given a vision that will concern days yet to come. It will speak to his mourning concerning the seeming failure of the Jews to re-establish themselves in Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Daniel has already been spoken to and touched in order to raise him up. Now his lips are touched in verse 16, but he is still weak and overcome. We should likely see in Daniel's experience here, the touching and raising up of him, some reference to the experience of Israel itself.

Daniel stands for the nation that will also need assistance at critical moments in the years that follow. In the visions of these chapters, there are a number of references to empires that are brought low without receiving any aid. Daniel receives a touch and the nation of Israel will be touched at various points in its history and assisted in order that it might not be finally overcome.

Daniel is a man greatly loved and he is strengthened accordingly. His people will also be strengthened and raised up in the years that follow. Gabriel, the angel charged with subduing these empires to the service of the Lord, now has to wrestle with Persia once again. And once he is finished with Persia, he will have to wrestle with Greece. His only great support in this struggle is Michael, the Prince of Israel, the angel of the Lord, whom I believe we should see as a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. A question to consider, where else in Scripture do we have references to Michael?