

“DANIEL’S VISION OF A MAN.”

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Scripture Text: Daniel 10:1-12

Introduction.

As we turn to chapter 10 we are coming to the last major section of the book of Daniel. Chapters 10-12 are the final vision of Daniel. Chapter 10 is one long introduction to the vision that comes in chapter 11 and concludes in chapter 12.

Chapters 11 and 12 are a lengthy detailed prophecy of the future, filling in some of the blanks of the nature of the 62 weeks of years in chapter 9.

The setting for Daniel’s last vision, vss. 1-3

Verse one gives the context for all that follows to the end of Daniel.

This final vision takes place in the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, meaning the third year after Cyrus defeated and overthrew Babylon around 539 BC.

The first question is what is Daniel doing still in Babylon which is now Persia?

We know that in Cyrus’ first year he gave the Jews permission to return to Jerusalem and in Nehemiah we read of the return of 42,000 (Nehemiah 7:66).

But in the third year of Cyrus Daniel is still in exile, still working for the government, still praying for his people. What is he doing standing by the Tigris River?

[As an aside, it is interesting how our history intersects with Daniel’s history. The Tigris River flows through Mosul where there has been recent intense fighting with ISIS, and it flows through Baghdad. There are US soldiers standing by the Tigris today.]

Was Daniel too old to travel that great distance? What do you think? We know Daniel to be a man of integrity, character and conviction, who does only what the Lord wants him to do. He is only in Persia because he is under conviction that is where God wants him.

God had leaders for the work in Jerusalem, God needed him to be a leader for His work in Babylon. Strategic work, spiritual work, holy work.

God's will and God's work for Daniel in exile were not finished. In his old age of over 80 God still has work for Daniel, still has a purpose as long as he draws breath.

We should not coast in doing the Lord's work for as long as He gives us life and breath. Do we not pray, "Thy will be done" and is that not good enough until the day we die. Don't live for the day you can do nothing, live every day for His will, to do something for the kingdom.

Daniel is in the king's court to plead the cause of his people before the king. Daniel's work of prayer in Persia was as useful as the people's work of rebuilding the walls and the temple in Jerusalem.

There was a lot of heavy lifting going on in Jerusalem that was being enabled by Daniel's heavy praying back in Persia. Never assume that physical labor is the most important labor. God's work is accomplished by our prayer work. Senior saints, don't grow weary in your holy calling to pray for God's work.

SERVE is a work week that can't be done without prayer work. 64 workers are coming and we need 64 prayer workers to join them and support them.

Does prayer matter, does it work?

In Daniel's case his prayers drew the immediate attention of God who sent angels straight to him.

"I have come because of your words" (Daniel 10:12).

God began to answer Daniel's prayer immediately but he didn't know it for three weeks. He pressed on intensely, fervently. And in his patient persistence he received an answer. Even without any assurance of an answer, he prayed, "God, give me understanding."

We have not because we ask not. Or we ask but show our requests to be weak and unimportant, uninspired, without any earnestness, by our neglectful and forgetful prayers.

God answers those who really want an answer, God answers those who wait in tears, who wait in heartfelt earnestness.

Prayer is God's chosen means for working in our world. We ask, He works, He gets the glory and we get the blessing. We should sweat more in prayer than in our ceaseless strivings and efforts and works in our own strength.

Do you think your prayers have no effect? Do you think God doesn't hear, or hearing doesn't answer? Do you think if the answer doesn't come right away that there is no answer?

Do you know by faith that God hears the minute we begin praying and begins answering the moment we ask? But that answer can take a myriad of shapes, and come to pass in a moment or in a season or after our life time.

My mother's prayers for my brother were answer after she died and weeks before he died. A great great grandmother's prayers on my mother's side for a descendent to serve God as a pastor were answered long after her death. I am one of those answers.

My prayers for a church to serve took God 12 months to answer. Your prayers for a pastor took God 14 months to answer. And those are short answers.

Luke Short was a farmer in New England who lived to be 100 years old. One day he was contemplating his death and became fearful of facing the judgment of God and he remembered a sermon and a prayer that he has heard 85 years before at the age of 15 while still living in England before immigrating to America. In that moment he surrendered his life to Christ. That pastor was long dead, but God used his prayer to save a soul (John Flavel, *The Mystery of Providence*, p. 11).

The church still needs Daniels, the church desperately needs Daniels, now more than ever. People doing the hidden, little noticed, work of strategic praying, praying for the laborers, for the church and her leaders and the proclaiming of God's Word.

A great conflict.

One great overarching reason for the necessity of prayer in Daniel's day and ours is the awareness of a great conflict or a great war, a great period of suffering for God's people.

The vision in chapter 11 will focus of great upheavals, wars and warfare, and severe suffering.

This can be a hard concept for us American Christians to fully grasp. We have enjoyed a couple hundred years of living under a government that shows at least some restraint in persecuting Christians. We have a great deal of freedom to worship. Increasing amounts of wickedness and immorality are being pressed on us, but we still have a significant measure of freedom and a relatively small degree of suffering for our faith.

But this is not the norm. In fact what we have is abnormal, an anomaly in our day and in most of history.

The majority of our brothers and sister with whom we will share eternity experienced daily suffering, being pursued, attacked, beaten, imprisoned and killed. Even today countless

millions of believers are treated and abused horribly in North Korea, Myanmar, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan, parts of India and China. And today Egypt.

Christians have been hurt, and hated and hunted through all the centuries. For most *faith in Christ* and *suffering for Christ* are two sides of the same coin.

Philippians 1:29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.

What we are experiencing here is not the norm and we should not project our life and lifestyle onto others. Rather we should pray for them, support them, help them, suffer with them.

We will know Christ by His scars, by what He suffered on our behalf. Most of our brothers and sisters will be known by their scars, by their suffering. Affliction is the mark of most Christians.

We are told this not to make us depressed but to make us ready, to be strong and courageous when our time comes.

The consequence of loving and serving Jesus Christ is that the world will hate us, the world will be at enmity with us. In this life we will have conflict.

Even so sweet a Psalm as Psalm 23 makes it clear. God gives us much good, but there is also the presence of enemies, of strife, of conflict, of opposition.

John 15:18-20 “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

James 4:4 Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Fasting for clarity, vss. 2-4.

We already know Daniel to be a man of prayer. Remember he was thrown in the lion’s den for keeping his routine of praying three times a day, facing Jerusalem. And we already know Daniel to be a man accustomed to the discipline of fasting. In the very first chapter we encountered him as a young man in his late teens willing to forgo certain foods and drink.

We should be aware there is no one kind of fasting, no one way, no one amount of time. Daniel fasted on vegetables and water for 10 days in chapter one and for 21 days in chapter 10.

There are all kinds of fasts in Scripture, from some foods and some drinks, to all food. For periods of one meal to forty days. For different reasons.

Daniel's three weeks of fasting and prayer is pretty intense. That's a long time. Why so much mourning, lamenting, crying out? Why is he trying so hard to understand?

What is motivating Daniel to pray and fast?

First, he is seeking understanding. As Scripture says if any lacks wisdom, let him ask of God. Daniel earnestly wants to know what is coming for him and his people.

Daniel 8:27 And I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days. Then I rose and went about the king's business, but I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it.

Daniel 9:21-23 while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. 22 He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. 23 At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you.

Daniel 10:12 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."

The last verse of our text makes clear this has been a focused, extended time of pressing into God in serious prayer. It is hard for us to imagine doing this. For us it would take quite a crisis.

Second, it is the third year of Cyrus' rule, word has been coming back to Daniel by this time of the great trials and suffering his people are experiencing back in Jerusalem.

Ezra 4:4-5 Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Can you imagine on-going, unrelenting opposition and resistance and accusations; troubles at every turn? Daniel may be fasting in solidarity with his people struggling back in Jerusalem. Suffering with those who are suffering.

Hebrews 13:3 Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

Sometimes we forgo some of our luxuries for the sake of those who have much less. Going without or going with less reminds us of the life many of our brothers and sisters live in all the time. Abstinence reminds us that we are not entitled, and that this world is not our home.

We need to break our attachments so we don't become too attached or too soft. Prayer and fasting are a humbling of ourselves and a reminding of how desperately dependent we are on God.

Fasting is simply abstaining from food for a period of time for a spiritual purpose. There is a difference between going hungry or going on a diet and fasting. It is a spiritual discipline done for a spiritual purpose in hopes of receiving a spiritual reward.

Fasting increases our sense of *humility and dependence on God*.

Fasting *testifies to a true repentance for sin*.

Fasting focuses us, enabling us to give our full and *undivided attention to God and prayer*.

Fasting *strengthens our desire and our ability to avoid sin and resist temptations* to yield to sin.

Fasting brings about an *increased spiritual and mental awareness of God's presence*.

Fasting shows just how real, *sincere, genuine and earnest our prayers* for clarity really are.

If you have never fasted to focus your prayers, this Holy Week would be a good time to experiment with this spiritual discipline. We can fast and pray for our council elections and for the SERVE project, and for persecuted Christians. Maybe a meal or two, maybe lunches to pray, to focus on God, on what Jesus did for us and why. Maybe a dinner. Maybe Good Friday or Holy Saturday. Whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it for the glory of God.

Prayer: Increase in us a hunger and thirst for you, for your ways, for your righteousness and your kingdom. Give us a deep thirst for the living God, until our heart and our flesh cry out for the courts of the Lord, for your presence. Lord, don't leave us where we are and don't let us leave the same way we came in. Kill the world in us before it kills us, and transform us from within by the renewing work of your Holy Spirit. Come Lord Jesus, come Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.