

## The Vision of the Man

Daniel 10:1-21

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

March 15, 1998

If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Daniel, chapter 10. In Daniel, chapter 10, beginning in verse 1 we see a vision recorded for us. We said last week as we look at Daniel 1 through 6, we have somewhat of a partial biography of Daniel. But then when we moved to Daniel, chapters 7 through 12, we moved to the spiritual experiences which underlie Daniel's public ministry. We've said that this whole book is about the blessings of knowing God, and that Daniel is one of the best examples, one of the best models in all of the Scripture as to what it means to know God.

We also said as we study Daniel, chapter 9, that prayer really reveals a lot about us, and this, one of longest prayers recorded in the Bible, reveals for us the true Daniel. John Owen said that, "What an individual is in secret, on his knees before God, that he is and no more." And so we saw what Daniel was like because we saw him in secret on his knees before God in Daniel, chapter 9.

And we also saw that in Daniel's prayer he had come to realize this was a critical time for the people of God. The time of the end of the exile was upon him and upon the people of Israel, and he realized that he needed to give himself in prayer for the people of God, as God prepared to answer His promises in the word by the prophet Jeremiah and take some of His people back into Jerusalem to rebuild the fallen temple and the fallen walls. So Daniel devoted himself to prayer and here in Daniel, chapter 10, we come to yet another vision given by God to Daniel. Let us hear the word of the living God.

### Daniel 10

*Our Lord and our God, we bless You for Your word. And we ask that this word would be for us tonight a spiritual nourishment, an encouragement to faithfulness in desperate times, an encouragement to godliness in worldly times, an encouragement to hope in times which are hopeless. Give us the grace and strength to believe according to Your word and reveal to us the lessons which this divine messenger brought to Daniel. For we ask it Jesus' name, Amen.*

In chapter 10 we have yet another heavenly vision in this book. In fact, it is a vision which introduces for us everything else which is to come in this book

because Daniel 10 through 12, is the final section of this great book. This vision emphasizes for us vital truths about the nature of reality. It emphasizes that human causes and effects are not the only forces or influences operative in this world. In fact, they are not even the most important influences in this world. There is something behind them. We're not surprised to find Daniel here in mourning and in prayer. We have seen his spiritual discipline before, but there is something unique about his fasting and his mourning and his tears and his prayers in this passage. A. W. Tozer in his essay, *God Tells the Man Who Cares*, says this: "The Bible was written in tears, and to tears it will yield its best treasures." God has nothing to say to the frivolous man. It was Moses, a trembling man, that God spoke to on the mount, and the same man later saved the nation when he threw himself before God with the offer to have himself blotted out of God's book for Israel's sake. Daniel's long season of fasting and prayer brought Gabriel from heaven to tell him the secret of the centuries. When the beloved John wept because no one could be found worthy to open the seven-sealed book, one of the elders comforted him with the joyous news that the Lion of the tribe of Judah had prevailed. God speaks to us from tears, to the tears of our own hearts. And the messenger of God came to Daniel here to tell him something that would give him strength and peace, and this message is designed to give us strength and peace as well.

### **I. God wants us to have a heart for the people of God, and to express that heart in prayer.**

I'd like to point several things to your attention in this passage tonight. The first one you will see in the first three verses where we have a setting of the vision. Here God teaches us that He wants us to have a heart for the people of God. God wants us to have a heart for the people of God and to express that heart for the people of God in prayer. In these meticulously detailed verses we get a glimpse of Daniel's heart, his concern for the people of God, and two facts in the first three verses strike us immediately. First, Daniel is in Babylon. We learn here, in verses 1 and 4, that Daniel is apparently still in Babylon, even though we know that in the first year of Cyrus some of the exiles went back to Jerusalem. And yet Daniel is still in Babylon. We learn that from Ezra in chapter 1, verses 1 through 4.

Second, we also note that Daniel is fasting during feast days. We. According to the time frame that he tells us about, as he tells us those three weeks in which he was fasting, it indicates that those days of fasting occurred during the feast days of Passover and unleavened bread. Those were not days for fasting. Those were days for celebration. Those were days meant for the people of God to remember the great deliverance that the Lord had given them in the exodus and the promises that He would pour out upon them. But Daniel is in sackcloth and ashes, abstaining from tasty food and in deep prayer and mourning.

Two questions. Why was Daniel still there and why was Daniel fasting? We'll have to do a little bit of implication work, because Daniel is a little too humble to tell us directly all the things that we might want to know. Why was Daniel still there? Was he too old to return? Well, we do know that he was well into his retirement years, eighty, maybe even ninety years old by now. We also know that there would be much heavy labor and hard work awaiting all those exiles who went back to Jerusalem. Perhaps Daniel did not want to burden those who had to carry on the heavy labor in Jerusalem for caring for someone who was feeble, perhaps like himself. Or perhaps was Daniel thinking of the young leaders that God had appointed over this new movement? Ezra and Nehemiah would be called by God to serve as leaders. Can you imagine these young men trying to lead God's people with Daniel in their midst? Who would you want to listen to? Ezra, or Nehemiah or Daniel? Perhaps Daniel held himself back in order that the people of God would follow the appointed leaders, though they were many years his junior. Or perhaps was Daniel staying behind so that he could engage in the strategic work of prayer. Did Daniel feel that the greatest thing that he could do for the work of the rebuilding of Jerusalem would be to pray for the people of God? Sinclair Ferguson says, "What these leaders needed most, as Moses had needed before, was someone who would engage in the hidden but strategic work of prayer for the defense and advance of the kingdom of God." That may not have been the only reason that Daniel stayed behind. It may not even have been a major reason why Daniel stayed behind, but we do know for sure that that was precisely what he was praying about when the angelic visitor came to him: he was praying for the people of God, and he was praying for the protection and the blessing of the work of rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple.

Our second question though, was, "Why was he fasting?" We know from the roles of the exiles that Daniel may well have been discouraged by the fact that so few had determined to go back to Israel. After so many years of not singing the Lord's song in a strange land, apparently some of the Jews had decided that they didn't even want to sing the Lord's song in His own land, and so many had not gone back to Israel. Perhaps Daniel was mourning because of that.

But surely there's more to it than that. Daniel, we know, had heard of the opposition to the building program. He knew that there were many powerful forces ensconced in the ancient places of Israel that were determined to keep Israel from rebuilding the temple and the walls, and so he devotes himself to praying the work of God through those days of crisis.

There are many things that we can learn from these things recorded for us in these few verses. First of all I'd remind you that Daniel here gives us an example, in his personal sacrifice and spiritual commitment to a goal he would not enjoy. Daniel was wholly devoted to seeing the children of Israel re-established in the worship of God in Jerusalem, even though he himself would never, ever, receive an earthly benefit from that work. Listen to what Sinclair Ferguson says: "What is so remarkable about Daniel here is the way in which he consecrated himself to

advance God's kingdom even though he was not directly involved in the rebuilding of the temple, nor would he live to see it. This is the hallmark of true faith and commitment. He believed but did not receive what was promised. He prayed for blessing he would never personally witness. What commitment his decision to remain in Babylon displayed.”

We also are reminded in this passage of what a tremendous need we have in the church today for intercessors like Daniel. When our friend Glen Knecht left First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, one of the things that his assistant said that they feared most in losing him was the sheltering of prayer which he regularly provided for that congregation. Mark Ross, in fact, stood up in the pulpit the next Sunday and he said, “I fear for this church without the daily prayers of Glen Knecht. I fear what could happen in our midst because Glen was so faithful to pray to the Lord on behalf of this congregation.” Daniel was just such a man. And we could recount story after story of faithful people who have prayed for the Lord's people and been used by the Lord to bring blessings and revival because they had been faithful in their communion with the Lord in prayer. We have a tremendous need for that ministry in our own day.

Perhaps the Lord is calling you to that. William Still at Gilkumson, South Church in Aberdeen was a young man when he was called to that congregation. It had had liberal pastors for many years before he came. In fact, when he started the ministry in the Church of Scotland, you could have counted the evangelicals in the Church of Scotland on your hands. And so he went into a difficult situation to minister at a dying, downtown church in Aberdeen. After he had been there for a few months, an older lady in the congregation called him and asked him to come by for a visit at her home. And this is what she said to him. When I called she said to me, “I have been praying for many years that God would send a man who was a little bit out of the usual to do a work for the Lord here in Aberdeen. And from what I hear, you are the answer to my prayer.” She told me this: “I have been a widow for seventeen years. Formerly, I taught a Bible class for over 100 girls, many of whom have since gone to the mission field, and yet it was only after my dear husband died and I was by then rather frail and only able to sit at my fireside and pray, that the Lord gave me this burden. It was as if he had said to me, ‘you have served Me long with these girls and in your local congregation, but this is the task of your life, reserved for you in your eighties. You have to pray something for Aberdeen.’” Mr. Still ministered in that congregation for almost sixty years, and he nurtured all the leaders of the evangelical movement in the Church of Scotland right in the halls of the prayer meeting and in the sanctuary under the preaching of the word - Sinclair Ferguson, James Phillips, George Phillips, and we could go down the list. The faithful prayers of that woman used by God to be a blessing to His church. And I want to say precisely that it was Daniel's spiritual understanding and wisdom and discernment that led him to become a man of prayer. It was precisely his spiritual understanding that taught him how important prayer was. We live in a day where we are far more infatuated with programs than we are with prayer. But as E. M. Bounds told us in his

classic, "The church is looking for better methods. God is looking for better men, for people are God's methods."

## **II. God wants us to know and remember His greatness, forgiveness and faithfulness.**

There's a second thing we learn in this great passage and you will see it in verses 4 through 9, where we have this overwhelming visit, this vision of the heavenly visitor. And there God teaches us that He wants us to know and remember His greatness and His forgiveness and His faithfulness. God wants us to know His greatness and His forgiveness and His faithfulness. In answer to Daniel's faithful prayers, Daniel receives a vision, a revelation from the Lord. Daniel is left alone, however, when this vision appears by the side of the river, because just like in the days of Saul on the road to Damascus, when the Lord appeared, everyone else was blinded and stricken with terror and fled. And so Daniel is left alone to see this vision from the Lord. And the vision itself, whatever the particulars of it mean, the vision itself is meant to communicate the all-powerfulness of the Lord, the all-gloriousness of the Lord, and the strength of His providence on behalf of His people. I don't think that we should ascribe a meaning to every particular point of detail in this vision. But two things do immediately strike us as we read this vision.

Look at verses 5 and 6 in Daniel, chapter 10. Daniel says, "I lifted my eyes and looked and behold there was a certain man dressed in linen whose waist was girded with a belt of pure gold." Linen was the clothing that the High Priest wore when he entered into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement to offer a sacrifice for the forgiveness of his people's sins. Daniel is being reminded here of the forgiveness of God. What has Daniel been doing? He's been pouring out his heart. We saw it in Daniel, chapter 9, confessing the sins of God's people. Now he is lamenting the fact that so many of God's people don't even want to go back to the land, even though the kings have allowed them to return from the exile. He's confessing himself before God and wondering if God is just going to wipe His people off the face of the earth because of their wickedness. And what does God show him? The vision of a man in linen reminding him of the priest, reminding him of the forgiveness which God has purchased for His people.

Notice also in verse 6 that we are told that one of the things that he sees about this figure is his appearance. His face had the appearance of lightning. His eyes were like flaming torches. And again, lightning is a biblical symbol often used to indicate power and glory. You remember at Sinai when God manifested His glory, there was thunder and there was lightning to indicate His power.

Lightning also is a symbol in the Bible for the coming of the Lord in the prophets and in the New Testament, and so it reminds us of God's faithfulness. When Daniel sees the lightning, he recalls the faithfulness of God's Law and promises

at Mount Sinai given to the people of God. And so God is stressing to Daniel both His forgiveness and His faithfulness in the vision.

And by reminding Daniel of His past forgiveness and His continuing faithfulness, God is encouraging Daniel to trust in Him, even in a bleak time. Knowledge of God's grace work in the past encourages us to trust Him in the future. But if we do not remember and attend to the blessings which He has done in the past, we will not have benefit of those promises and the assurances which we have for the future. That's one reason why it's so important for us to study Christian history and Christian biography. It's one of the reasons it's so important for us to be acquainted with the great movements of God in the past. Not so that we can set them up and idolize them, but so that we can be encouraged by what God has done in the past and we can face our sometimes bleak situations in the presence with the knowledge that God can do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we can ask or think. And if we don't rehearse the great things that He has done in the past, we won't have that hope for the presence.

Let me say again, however, that the presence of God which He brings to Daniel in this, his hour of need, leaves a mark on Daniel. We talk about intimacy with God all the time today. But let me say, in the Bible, intimacy with God always leaves its mark. The great Old Testament picture of what it means to be intimate with God is in the limping Jacob, moving away slowly, with an injured hip after encountering the captain of the hosts of the Lord. When you are intimate with God, it leaves a mark. Listen to what Ferguson says about Daniel: "Such people who have seen God's glory and grace can never be the same again. They have come to know who God is, and in His presence they come to know what they are themselves in their need and by their grace. They lose their taste for all that is trivial. They learn to live as Daniel did, near to God. They are never far from heaven because they know they are no longer distanced from it by the guilt of sin. Forgiven and cleansed, they have a presence about them. It is the presence of God." Presence with God leaves a mark. In this passage when God draws close to Daniel, Daniel is left on his face, trembling first, prostrate, and then unconscious. And even when he is lifted to his feet by the angelic visitor, he trembles in the presence of the Lord. The presence of the Lord leaves its mark.

### **III. God wants us to be aware of the greater battle behind our struggles.**

There's one last thing that I'd like to direct your attention to here in verses 10 through the end of the chapter, and into the very first verse of chapter 11. Here we see a picture of the spiritual battle for the kingdom. Daniel was always a man who thought beyond his own individual circumstances. You don't find Daniel, in the book of Daniel, being preoccupied with his personal miseries, with the fact that he's separated from his land, that he's not back in the land of Israel. You find Daniel always preoccupied with the big picture of the people of God. The whole of the nation of Israel. But in this passage, God is again going to ask Daniel to

stretch the boundaries of his thought and prayer, and to see that there is something bigger going on in the return from exile, even bigger than the return of a nation to a land which God had promised to them so many years ago. There is something far greater behind that struggle. And in this passage from verse 10 on, God wants us to be aware of the greater battle behind our struggles in this life.

The angelic visitor in this passage comes to explain to Daniel God's message. In verse 20 he tells us that. We're told in verses 12 and 13 that the angelic visitor had left the minute that Daniel began to pray, "I left immediately." The Lord had dispatched him from heaven the minute that Daniel began praying. But you remember that Daniel had been fasting for three weeks and the angelic visitor tells us that it took him three weeks to get there. So what's going on? Is heaven three weeks away from earth? No.

The angelic visitor says this: There is a conflict behind the return from captivity. It represents a greater spiritual battle in which Daniel's prayers are playing a part. You remember that Daniel knew that while Cyrus was away on the visitation, he had left in his place as regent his son, Cambyses, who had attempted to keep the children of Israel from going back from Persia to Jerusalem. And Daniel had immediately begun to pray that God would thwart what the earthly King of Persia, the regent of Persia, Cambyses, was doing. Now who does the angel say he was wrestling with for three weeks, that kept him from coming to see Daniel? The King of Persia, Cambyses? No. The *angelic* King of Persia. Principalities and powers far above this earthly conflict were working to prevent the return from captivity. As Daniel had prayed, God in heaven had heard, for God had set Daniel praying. Daniel's prayer was simply a reflection of God's own heart. And in God's decree, one was sent out to do spiritual battle in response to Daniel's prayers. We learn so much from this.

We learn first of all, that the events of this world cannot be interpreted by the cannons of historians alone. History is spiritual, and Washington and London and Berlin and Tokyo and Beijing and Moscow are not at the center of the ultimate power struggle of history. Abraham Piper, that famous Dutch prime minister and theologian and man of God, said at the beginning of this century, "If once the curtain were pulled back and the spiritual world behind it came into view, it would expose to our spiritual vision, a struggle so intense, so convulsive, so sweeping, everything within it's range, that the fiercest battle ever fought on earth would seem by comparison a mere game." Not here, but up there, that is where the real conflict is waged. Our earthly struggle grows in its backlash. The battle is spiritual.

In St. Louis they tell a story of Francis Schaeffer talking to a young man to whom he was witnessing, and he was attempting to impress upon him the nature of spiritual reality. They sat in the Bible Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, and Schaeffer asked him, "What do you see in this room?" And he began to name things, "I see a baptismal font and I see pews and carpet and I see

chandeliers.” And Schaeffer said, “What else do you see?” And he continued naming until he had named everything that he could see in the room and Schaeffer kept asking him, “But is there anything else?” And finally the young man said, “Well, no, I don’t see anything else. I’ve named everything that I can find in the room.” Schaeffer said, “Let me tell you what I see. I see powers and principalities. I see spiritual forces above engaged in a war for your soul.” And so he stressed to him the reality of the spiritual conflict. Christians are inevitably caught up in that spiritual conflict and our prayers have a role.

This passage also stresses to us the power of prayer. I want to emphasize that the power of prayer is not in the prayer. The power of prayer is in God. And I also want to stress that it is very clear from the life of Daniel that the power of prayer is connected to the power of holiness. It is the righteous man whose effectual prayers avail much. The life and the prayer, our character and our prayer goes together. There is no disjunction. That is one of the things that we learn in this passage.

You will note again from verse 8 that Daniel was left alone by his friends in the midst of this vision. But this passage makes it clear that Daniel is not alone. In fact, God’s people are never alone. Though Daniel is left without friends and companions, though Daniel is perhaps left as one of the few godly Israelites in Babylon, he is never alone. Sinclair Ferguson says throughout this book, “Daniel is obviously a man of heart. Now he is a man alone. But the truth of the matter was that he was never less alone in all his life.” For Daniel, though left behind by those faithful Israelites gone back to Jerusalem to rebuild the broken walls, left of his companions, was in the presence of God and he was not alone. There is a passage from this world to the heavenly world and vice-versa. And not only did Daniel use it, he lived at the point of contact between the two through his communion with God. And that is where we are called to live tonight. Let us pray.

*Our Lord and our God, we fall on our face before the awesome vision of Your presence. And we ask that You would show to our hearts its mysteries. Not the mystery of its details, O Lord, but the mystery of the realities to which it points. The realities of a heart which has concern for the people of God. The reality of Your greatness and forgiveness and Your faithfulness and the reality of the greater battle behind the struggles of this life. Help us to live in conscious communion with You by prayer that portal from this world to the next. We ask it in Jesus’ name, Amen.*

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

*This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.*



*Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the [First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement](#).*

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

#### **Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine***

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).