
The Book of Daniel

Chapter 10, Continued -- and Chapter 11:1-9

Ministry Reading -- July 3, 2013

Opening Reading -- Daniel 10:13-11:9

Daniel 10:13-11:9

But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days. And behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me. And I remained there with the kings of Persia. And I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people at the end of the days. For the vision is yet for many days. And as he was speaking with me according to these words, I set my face to the ground and became dumb. And behold, one after the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips. And I opened my mouth and spoke and said unto him that stood before me, My lord, by reason of the vision, my pains are turned upon me, and I retain no strength. And how can a servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? For as for me, straightway there remaineth no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me. Then there touched me again one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me. And he said, Fear not, man greatly beloved, peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And as he was speaking with me, I was strengthened. And I said, Let my lord speak, for thou hast strengthened me. And he said, Knowest thou wherefore I am come unto thee? And now I return to fight with the prince of Persia, and when I go forth, behold, the prince of Greece shall come. However, I will declare unto thee that which is set down in the scripture of truth. There is not one that showed himself strong with me against these, but Michael your prince. And I in the first year of Darius the Mede,

I stood to confirm and strengthen him. And now will I declare unto thee the truth. Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia, and the fourth shall enrich himself with great riches more than all. And when he hath become strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the realm of Greece. And a mighty king shall stand up that shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. And when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four wings of the heavens, but not to his posterity, nor according to his dominion would it be ruled. For his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others beside these. And the king of the south, who is one of his princes, shall be strong, and another shall be stronger than he, and have dominion. His dominion shall be a great dominion, and after the course of years they shall join affinity. And the king's daughter of the south shall come to the king of the north to make equitable conditions, but she shall not retain the strength of her arm, neither shall she stand, nor his arm, and she shall be given up, she and they that brought her, and they that begat her, and he that strengthened her in those times.

Daniel's Attitude Before God's Messengers

Daniel's attitude throughout this chapter -- and indeed throughout every occasion in which he has received a vision -- is not that of a man who is proud of his access to heavenly things. There is nothing of 'I thank God that angels appear to me and tell me things.' Instead, every vision is an occasion of great humility. He looks down; he falls on his face; his words are measured and deeply respectful. Daniel is keenly aware of who it is that is communicating these things to him, and his whole posture reflects that.

We live in a day that has little respect for authority in any form. Attitudes of disrespect are easy to absorb. Yet when we consider with Whom we have to do -- the living God, who is high and holy -- the right response is something like

Daniel's: to listen carefully, to weigh what is said, and to be slow to speak. Daniel sets his face to the ground and becomes silent. He is in an attitude of listening and receiving, not of commentary or display.

Darby on Angels and the Trial of Faith

J. N. Darby had a characteristically penetrating observation on the matter of angels being engaged in spiritual conflict while God's servants pray. He wrote, in his studies on the book of Daniel:

'Daniel had known nothing of all this. God in this way exercises the obedience of His angels and at the same time puts the faith of His servants to the test. I have no doubt it is the same for us. God also puts our faith to the trial. It is not that He does not hear and answer -- He knows perfectly beforehand what the end will be -- but He wishes to see if faith goes to the end of the difficulty, and then He answers. Faith, which is much more precious than gold that perishes, is thus put through its trial, and found unto praise at the appearing of Jesus Christ.'

God is not indifferent to the prayers of His people. He heard Daniel from the first day. But He permitted the conflict to continue for twenty-one days, and through it all Daniel persevered. That is the trial of faith.

The Scripture of Truth: All Things Already Set

The angel says to Daniel in verse 21, 'I will declare unto thee that which is set down in the scripture of truth.' This is not a direction to Daniel to go and read his Bible. It is something more significant: it is the angel's declaration that what he is about to reveal has already been determined. Everything in the coming history of these kingdoms is already settled. The angel does not construct these things out of his own thoughts about what might happen; he recounts what God has already fixed.

This should give us confidence as we read the eleventh chapter. All the history there recorded -- and it is detailed history, as we shall see -- was set down before it occurred. God is not flexing His power by predicting the future, as a man might show off his intelligence. He always has a purpose in what He reveals. When we ask the Lord to help us understand these scriptures, what we are asking is that we might understand what His purpose was in revealing them.

The Succession of Persian Kings: Ezra 4

Verse 2 of chapter 11 speaks of three more kings in Persia after Cyrus, with the fourth enriching himself greatly and stirring all against Greece. Ezra 4:5-6 gives us a useful accounting of the succession of Persian kings:

Ezra 4:5-6

And they hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia, and in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. And in the days of Artaxerxes...

We have here a succession: Cyrus, Darius, Ahasuerus (the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther), and Artaxerxes. This gives us a practical accounting of the kings referred to in the prophecy. The fourth, enriched above all the rest, stirs the whole Persian power against Greece -- and that sets the stage for the mighty king of verse 3.

The Mighty King and the Division of His Kingdom

The mighty king of verse 3 -- who stands up and rules with great dominion and does according to his will -- is Alexander the Great, king of Greece. His career was extraordinary, and his kingdom was broken at the peak of its power. He died

at the age of thirty-two, and his kingdom was divided 'toward the four wings of the heavens' -- not to his posterity, as verse 4 explicitly states, and not according to the manner in which he ruled. It was plucked up for others besides his heirs. Those 'others' are the four generals among whom his empire was divided.

The King of the South and the King of the North

From verse 5 onward, we are introduced to the two great powers that will contend throughout the following decades: the king of the south and the king of the north. These are not individual kings who each lived for centuries. They are kingdoms -- dynasties, really -- each with a succession of rulers. As God views them morally, they are 'the king of the south' and 'the king of the north' -- one moral character across the whole succession.

The significance of north and south is, of course, relative to Jerusalem. Every time these kingdoms marched against one another, they passed directly through the land of Israel. This is why these things are recorded in Daniel's prophecy. These were not distant wars of no concern to God's people. They were catastrophic events that swept through Israel time after time. We will return to that point as we enter chapter 11 more fully.

In verse 6, an attempt is made to forge peace between the two powers through a royal marriage: the king of the south sends his daughter to the king of the north. This was a common device among warring kingdoms -- if my daughter marries your king, you will not attack her people. But the attempt ends in disaster. She does not retain the strength of her position; she is given up, along with those who accompanied her and those of her own house. Historically, she was murdered, and the whole arrangement produced the opposite of the peace it sought. Out of her roots, however, a shoot stands up -- her brother -- who raises an army and exacts retribution. These events all came to pass precisely as described.

Daniel as Faithful Servant of Darius

Chapter 11, verse 1, contains the angel's note that he stood in the first year of Darius the Mede to confirm and strengthen him. That was Daniel's role: he was Darius's faithful servant. We have already read of Darius in chapter 6 -- the lion's den. Was Darius indifferent to Daniel in that episode? Not at all. He was deeply distressed, spent the night fasting, and ran to the den early in the morning. He valued Daniel. Daniel was a faithful servant to a pagan king.

This is a point worth pausing over. One sometimes encounters among believers a subtle attitude that their standards of conduct need not be as high toward those who are not of God's people as toward their brothers. Daniel knew nothing of this. His faithfulness to Darius was complete, precisely because he was in the place where the Lord had put him and he discharged his duties with integrity -- not for Darius's sake, but for God's. The result was that even a pagan king had a genuine care for him.

The Structure of Chapters 10-12

It is worth holding before us the overall structure of what we are reading. Chapter 10 sets the scene -- the prelude. Chapter 11 recounts the history of the Gentile powers during the times of Gentile dominion. Chapter 12 addresses the condition of Israel's remnant during the last period of Gentile power, when the revived Roman Empire is in place. Then all authority passes into the hands of Christ when He sets up His kingdom, and there is no more Gentile power of empire.

The chapter divisions, again, are not inspired. What we call chapters 10, 11, and 12 is really one long prophecy -- one vision with three aspects. Keeping this in mind will help us as we follow the thread through what is, in places, intricate and detailed ground.

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Lord willing.