

DANIEL — WEEK 12

BIG VISION



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The cover image is Daniel in the Lions' Den by Peter Paul Rubens

Gabriel shows up suddenly while Daniel is standing with his buddies on the shore of the Tigris. The friends don't see Gabriel, but Daniel does, and he gets a super important message.

Wars and great strife are coming,

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1 Daniel 10:1–9

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar. The message was true, but the appointed time was long; and he understood the message, and had understanding of the vision. In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.

Now on the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, that is, the Tigris, I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist was girded with gold of Uphaz! His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice 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 terror fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. Therefore I was left alone when I saw this great vision, and no strength remained in me; for my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength. Yet I heard the sound of his words; and while I heard the sound of his words I was in a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground.

By this point, Cyrus has allowed the Jews to return to Israel where they begin the task of restoring the temple. Although Daniel is now too old to be much use in the restoration, his role as a prophet and spiritual leader is significant. He's now quite famous—worldwide, not just with his own people.

Thus, Daniel knows well what his personal mission field is. He's where he needs to be, doing what he needs to do. Unfortunately, the temple restoration isn't going so well. Fierce opposition has halted the reconstruction. What's a prophet to do in times like this?

In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.

Daniel's prayer and fasting sets the stage for his greatest vision—spanning three whole chapters. It will detail battles on earth and in the heavenly realms.

The connection between the two will be electrifying.

This vision isn't a dream. Daniel isn't asleep, and he isn't alone either. His buddies don't see what he sees, *a certain man clothed in linen*, but they see enough to scatter in terror.

But the vision of this man knocks Daniel out. *I was left alone when I saw this great vision, and no strength remained in me; for my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength. Yet I heard the sound of his words; and while I heard the sound of his words I was in a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground.*

The presence of holiness always seems to be too much for folks to handle.

2 Daniel 10:10–14

Suddenly, a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and on the palms of my hands. And he said to me, “O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you.” While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling.

Then he said to me, “Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia. Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come.”

Notice that the speaker doesn't say, “the prince of Persia,” but, “the prince of the kingdom of Persia.” These princes are angels, and so is the speaker. Thus, this passage yields an important insight—angels don't have dominion over time. Dominion over time means never having to explain why you're late.

Angels are powerful, ancient, smart, and scary, but they reside inside time, just like us. This applies to fallen angels as well as good ones. Our enemies are to be feared, but they don't know the future. They may be better at interpreting prophesy than we are, but that's all. They don't have any inside knowledge of what's coming.

Conversely, God, who is outside of time, knows all things and can give out inside information to whomever He chooses. This doesn't happen in prophetic form very often, but everything God does is in the context of His perfect plan for all things—past, present, and future.

Never forget this when you pray. You know what you want, but He knows what you need.

There are two essential takeaways from this. First, God's answers to prayer should be interpreted with an eye towards the long term. His answers are often slow or come in baby steps. That seems to be by design.

Character development is a big part of what's going on. Even when God grants us the underserved favor of giving us what we asked for, character development may be a big part of how He choreographs it.

Second, the enemies do not take such a long view. Not knowing what's coming, their actions seem surprisingly short term and not strategic. They are never patient.

This seems stupid because it is stupid. While the spiritual forces of evil are vastly smarter and more experienced than we are, they are also totally consumed by sin.

One of the hallmarks of sin is the way it makes us do stupid things. It seems to have a similar effect on angels.

The devil is the ultimate Darwin Award winner.

3 Daniel 10:15–19

When he had spoken such words to me, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless. And suddenly, one having the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke, saying to him who stood before me, “My lord, because of the vision my sorrows have overwhelmed me, and I have retained no strength. For how can this servant of my lord talk with you, my lord? As for me, no strength remains in me now, nor is any breath left in me.

Then again, the one having the likeness of a man touched me and strengthened me. And he said, “O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!”

So when he spoke to me I was strengthened, and said, “Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.”

The vision of heavenly warfare is greatly terrifying. Daniel knows that the forces involved are way beyond human comprehension, much less susceptible to human action. The realization of how powerless he is overwhelms Daniel. He can hardly speak.

“For how can this servant of my lord talk with you, my lord? As for me, no strength remains in me now, nor is any breath left in me.”

Then the angel strengthens Daniel, but notice how he does it—first with a touch, then with words. I’d expect the touch to scare the pants off Daniel, but it has the exact opposite effect. That’s curious because the presence of holiness is always terrifying, and I’d expect it to be more terrifying as it got closer. But contact erases that. The touch shows that the touch doesn’t kill you. That’s got to be comforting.

The angel’s words confirm this. *“O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!”* Daniel is told, “You’re loved, don’t fear, shalom be upon you, and be strong.”

That’s a pretty cool message coming from an angel.

Serious service to the Lord is going to put us into fearsome situations. That’s when we’ll need encouragement.

But here’s the trick question — “When was the last time you prayed for encouragement?” Has the idea of asking the Lord to encourage you or to comfort you ever even crossed your mind?

Not me. I pray for the Lord to give encouragement, comfort, and shalom to others, but never for myself.

“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.” — Deuteronomy 31:6

“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” — Hebrews 13:5

One thing you can count on, the Lord will not leave you hanging out to dry.

4 Daniel 10:20–11:1

Then he said, “Do you know why I have come to you? And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth. (No one upholds me against these, except Michael your prince. Also in the first year of Darius the Mede, I, even I, stood up to confirm and strengthen him.)”

Yikes. The angel needs to *return to fight*? Think about the priorities behind that statement.

First of all, this means that the battle is not a slam-dunk for the good guys. The *prince of Persia* is apparently no pushover. Given that heavenly battles are generally more important than what’s going on down here, that’s pretty chilling. The fact that he needs to get back *now* is none too comforting either.

But this also means that his visiting Daniel is important; it’s worth his breaking away from the fight. But why? How could little old Daniel be that important? What can he do with this information that’s worth losing precious time?

Well, little old Daniel just happens to be writing scripture. That will affect countless souls in countless ways. This prophesy is even referenced by the Lord Himself in the Olivet discourse.

“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” — Matthew 24:15–16

“So when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not” (let the reader understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” — Mark 13:14

This will color our analysis for the rest of Daniel. Something here is very, very important.

We’ll see the verses Jesus quoted at the end of chapter 11. That passage, and its impact later, makes this vision important all by itself.

The people who listened to Jesus’s advice fled to the hills in AD 70 prior to the Roman siege of Jerusalem. The people who retreated into the city (the standard response) had one of the worst outcomes in human history. At one point, the Romans were crucifying a thousand people a day.

The people listening to Jesus knew exactly what he was talking about because this prophesy was familiar to them. It was familiar to them because part of it had already been fulfilled and part of it hadn’t.

Imagine living in the middle of the fulfillment of a prophesy. You’d already seen some of it come true, yet there was more to come.

That would get my attention.

5 Daniel 11:2–10

“And now I will tell you the truth: Behold, three more kings will arise in Persia, and the fourth shall be far richer than them all; by his strength, through his riches, he shall stir up all against the realm of Greece. Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. And when he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken up and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not among his posterity nor according to his dominion with which he ruled; for his kingdom shall be uprooted, even for others besides these.

“Also the king of the South shall become strong, as well as one of his princes; and he shall gain power over him and have dominion. His dominion shall be a great dominion. And at the end of some years they shall join forces, for the daughter of the king of the South shall go to the king of the North to make an agreement; but she shall not retain the power of her authority, and neither he nor his authority shall stand; but she shall be given up, with those who brought her, and with him who begot her, and with him who strengthened her in those times.

“But from a branch of her roots one shall arise in his place, who shall come with an army, enter the fortress of the king of the North, and deal with them and prevail. And he shall also carry their gods captive to Egypt, with their princes and their precious articles of silver and gold; and he shall continue more years than the king of the North.”

“Also the king of the North shall come to the kingdom of the king of the South, but shall return to his own land. However his sons shall stir up strife, and assemble a multitude of great forces; and one shall certainly come and overwhelm and pass through; then he shall return to his fortress and stir up strife.

This is cryptic but was totally fulfilled. The first paragraph came true when Alexander the Great conquered everything, then died without an heir and his kingdom was divided among his four generals. The second paragraph was fulfilled by Ptolemy (*king of the South*), Ptolemy Philadelphina (*one of his princes*), Bernice (*daughter of Philadelphia*), and her marriage to Antiochus II Theos (*the third king of the North*), who was then poisoned by his jealous first wife leading to much mayhem, including the death of Bernice. (See the Ancient Christian Commentary of Scripture for more details.)

Bernice’s brother, Ptolemy Euergetes, is the *branch of her roots* mentioned in the third paragraph and he was none too happy with what happened to his sister. He invaded Syria and hauled off its treasures, including precious artifacts and 40,000 talents of silver. The fourth paragraph is just the set-up for a great conflict between the kingdom of the north (Syria) and the kingdom of the South (Egypt). The two sons are Seleucus III and Antiochus III (AKA Antiochus the Great). That fight is just getting started.

This fight stretched into the second century BC. So, at the time of Christ, parts of it were more recent to the Israelites than the American Revolution is to us. People could read Daniel’s prophecy in scrolls and hear tales about the action from their family members.

They were anxiously waiting for the next thing to unfold. To many, that meant the Messiah.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Have you ever had a vision or something you thought might be one?
2. When have you seen God answer a prayer “the long way”?
3. Are there prayers you pray for others but not yourself?
4. Which of the promises of Scripture do you think most about?
5. What are your war stories?

Items for prayer: