

DANIEL 10 CBC 17.1.2021

Welcome back to Daniel! We've reached chapter 10, and it's the start of one long unit that runs through to the end of the book. Ch.10 tells us how Daniel received a vision; ch.11 tells us what the vision was; and ch.12 tells us how to live wisely in the light of these things. A week ago I hoped we might swallow these chapters whole, but I think that might prove uncomfortable! So today we're confining ourselves to ch.10.

READ Da 10:1 - 11:1 ...

We've just read that there are hidden spiritual forces at work behind the governments of this world. And they're fighting one another – good versus evil. Do you really believe in angels and demons, and dark spiritual forces working in government offices? No-one likes to be thought crazy!

Let me ask you a question. What's the difference between Daniel 10 and the QAnon conspiracy theory that's been in the news recently? This is the belief, held by many people, that Donald Trump has been waging a secret war against a cabal of Satan-inspired paedophiles at the heart of the Washington establishment. It's a belief that inspired many of those who invaded the Capitol building – you may have seen the pictures of a colourful character who calls himself QAnon Shaman.

So if we believe Da 10, will we have to put a pair of horns on our head, paint our face, and invade parliament? Or, if we're disinclined to do that, should we also reject Da 10 to be consistent?

These are important questions! Hold on to them for a moment while we look at Da 10 so that we can be clear about what it's saying. And when we understand the text, then I'll tell you why I think we can and should believe it – but *not* put horns on our head and invade parliament.

What does Da 10 teach?

vv.1-3 tell us what Daniel was doing: engaging seriously with God. Fasting, mourning, and – although it's not mentioned, surely praying. That was his lifelong habit (6:10), and v.12 tells us Daniel was seeking understanding from God.

WHY was he taking hold of God like this? The clue is in the date in v.1: the third year of Cyrus. In the *first* year of Cyrus' reign, he gave the Jewish captives in Babylon permission to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple. Daniel had prayed about this in ch.9, and it happened soon after. Daniel himself stayed in Babylon – presumably because he was too old for the journey and for work on a building site (mid-eighties!). But you can see the smile on his face as he waved off the thousands of his people who left Babylon for Jerusalem. A lifetime of prayer fulfilled!

But by the third year of Cyrus the work on the temple had ground to a halt because of local opposition. You can read the story in the book of Ezra. The opponents of the temple had appealed to the Persian government to revoke the building permit. And it's likely Daniel has heard of this and is praying that the Persian authorities will support the builders. And as he wrestles with these issues, he comes to God and says, "*Lord, the restoration of your people isn't working out as I thought it would. What's going on?*"

And in response, God gives Daniel the revelation that's recorded here. Daniel is standing beside the river Tigris (v.4) and sees a vision of a glorious figure who looks like a man but is described very much in supernatural terms (vv.5-6). It may be another pre-incarnate glimpse of Christ, or it may be a particularly glorious angel. It's impossible to be certain. But whoever this is, he reflects God's splendour and sovereignty.

The whole experience is overwhelming. v.7 His companions flee in terror; v.8 Daniel turns deathly pale; v.9 he falls with his face to the ground; v.10 he trembles on his hands and knees; v.15 he's speechless; v.16 he's overcome with anguish; v.17 his strength is gone and he can hardly breathe. People who have a close-encounter with God in the Bible never think, "*This is fun!*" It's a serious business. It turns them to jelly. And afterwards they lose all taste for the trivial.

But the heavenly messenger touches Daniel (vv.10,16,18), and tells him that he is highly esteemed (v.11,19). And he tells Daniel that he has come in response to Daniel's prayers (v.12).

But now Daniel learns something very surprising: (v.13): "But I was held up for 21 days by the prince of the Persian kingdom (evidently a fallen angel). He resisted me, and only when another mighty angel called Michael came to help me was I able to move on. And (v.20) when I've delivered my message to you I'm going back to that tremendous conflict".

Think about that. Daniel is praying for the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple to get past Persian bureaucracy. But now he's told that the problem isn't simply hostile people in the government, but dark spiritual powers behind them. He learns that that the events of human history are bound up with events in heavenly places. The ultimate power struggle is not between Washington and Moscow and Beijing. The tensions in our world have their roots in a much older and more serious spiritual conflict. And they reflect that conflict. That's what the word of God tells us.

So what makes this different from QAnon? Why believe one rather than the other?

In a word: JESUS. QAnon Shaman doesn't differ from anyone else: he hasn't walked on water, stilled storms with a word, healed people born blind, fed thousands with a handful of loaves and fish, raised the dead, and himself been raised from death in a glorified body. But there's strong evidence that Jesus did all these things and many more. They give weight to His claims to be "God with us" - to have come from outside this world and to be able to tell us what's outside this world and what's really going on. And He tells us the Scripture cannot be broken. I believe my Bible because of Jesus. And I believe Jesus because of the evidence of His life, death and resurrection. QAnon Shaman offers no comparable evidence for his claims to special knowledge.

So we should listen to Jesus for good reasons. And if we'd spent time with Him in His earthly ministry, here are some of the things we'd have heard Him say:

- While you were preaching the gospel, I saw Satan fall! (Lk 10:18)
- Satan has kept this woman bound for 18 long years, but I'm setting her free! (Lk 13:16)
- Satan has desired to sift you, but I have prayed for you! (Lk 22:31-32)
- And if we tried to prevent Jesus going to the cross, we'd have heard Him say, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mk 8:33)

Jesus was constantly aware of the spiritual battle. You see Him living in this world of sin and suffering and pressing needs - but always aware of another world that makes sense of this one. He walked with the seen and the unseen, and we must do the same through Scripture and prayer.

And one of the ways Satan blinds us to these things is by letting loose ridiculous parodies like QAnon. It makes us sceptical of the whole spiritual realm. But the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ provide the credentials that QAnon lacks.

I hope you don't dismiss all banknotes because there are counterfeits. The real thing is still of tremendous value. And Jesus demonstrated that He's the real thing.

So believe what He says about unseen realities. And if it all seems unimportant to you now, a day is coming when it you'll realize it's more important than anything else. Because Jesus said, "*In my Father's house are many rooms*" (Jn 14:2). And on your deathbed, you'll want to know that that's true – that there's another world, and a Father ready to welcome you home.

Since this is the reality that's revealed, what does it mean for our lives?

It means there's a battle going on in heavenly places and earth groans beneath the fallout. No human being escapes the consequences. And as Christians, God enlists us in the fight by our prayers.

This doesn't mean we have to have a complicated doctrine of territorial spirits, trying to map things out in a way that's really a man-centred activity. God has told us all we need to know – that we're in a battle that's bigger than us, and we can't manage without His help. So we should pray!

Think about it like this. Daniel discovered that the struggle to advance God's work by rebuilding the temple wasn't a simple matter of talking nicely to government officials. There was a spiritual battle going on! In the New Testament, Paul sees the same thing in our gospel ministry. Why don't people believe a smooth gospel presentation? Satan has blinded their minds (2Co 4:5). And Paul saw that such spiritual opposition can only be dealt with by spiritual weapons, not the weapons of the world (2Co 10:3-5).

So we don't paint our faces, stick horns on our head and invade parliament. Instead, we fight this battle with the weapons of the gospel:

- Honest confession of our weakness and need
- Heartfelt prayer for the Holy Spirit to open blind eyes
- Humble sharing of the message about Jesus – that by His death and resurrection He frees us from our sins, and overcomes all the powers of evil.

Note that Good News! When you read about spiritual warfare in Scripture, you never see God nervous, as if the battle could go either way. Not at all! The death and resurrection of Jesus ensure the final destruction of Satan and all his forces. His sordid activities can't continue a moment longer than God permits.

Of course, we want to know why a sovereign God doesn't just crush His enemies instantly. He sometimes does! (e.g., Ac 12:23). But sometimes God who is all wise and always good sees it's best to take the long way round. And at least one reason for this is to train us to know our weakness – to wean us off our independence – and to teach us to pray!

We really are very weak. But we keep thinking we're strong which is why we're so bad at prayer. But it pleases God to use people who *know* they're weak. People who are let go of their proud self-sufficiency and learn to depend on God for everything.

That's Daniel. He's very weak. But when he's emptied of all confidence in his own resources, he's strengthened by grace (v.18) and given the ability to be strong (v.19). And that's exactly the message of the gospel: that we receive strength in weakness, to fight the battle like Daniel. Imagine a congregation of 85year-olds who pray – they'll be mighty for God!

But you don't have to be in your eighties! Will you enter into this battle? We still need Daniels. More often, what we have is Danielles! We let the women fight the battles. Guys – are we proud of that?

God has convicted me this week. I've been telling myself for a long time that I'll give myself to prayer in retirement. This week God has been saying, Why wait? And it has been a joyful privilege to share in the battle this week knowing that one day the fight will be finished, the victory celebration will begin, and the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank you for revealing to us something of the great unseen realities. Thank you that even while the battle rages, you are sovereign. Thank you that though the battle seems long to us, your timing is perfect. Thank you that in the weakness of human flesh our Lord Jesus has already achieved everything important. We ask that in our weakness your Holy Spirit would strengthen us to stand, to pray, and to be used by you. We ask this for the blessing of your world and the glory of your Name. AMEN.

FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION:

- How does this glimpse of the unseen world challenge the way you think – and live?
- How are you going to respond?