

Daniel 10-11:1 A glimpse of the spiritual battle

Introduction

The last three chapters of Daniel are together the final section of this book. Chapter ten records an encounter with a heavenly being and chapters eleven and twelve are a lengthy prophecy concerning future events. It is an understatement to admit that from the last section of Daniel chapter nine to the end of this book that it is not easy to discern what is being communicated here. In general terms we may get the broad picture, but God has chosen not to give us more details of future events through Daniel. However, what is important to note is that these special revelations from God are granted to a believer who spends an extended time of prayer and fasting in an attempt to discern the will of God. It is highly likely that Daniel knew much more about what was going in the Promised Land than many of his contemporaries in Babylon, not only through his direct Government contacts but also through these visions recorded in this book.

God met with Daniel here because He saw it really mattered to His servant on earth. It is a statement that God takes very seriously the responses of His people to events on earth when they bring to Him issues that they believe are important to Him. We are all well aware of the amazing variety of hobbies and interests of people around us and the extent to which people will display their loyalty to the cause. All manner of clubs and societies function in our country because a small number of dedicated men and women put in untold hours of work to ensure that they run smoothly and efficiently year by year. It is always a challenge to us as God's people –are we are committed to honouring the Lord and desiring the honouring of His name on earth as it is in heaven? We need to take a closer look at the circumstances behind this lengthy time Daniel spent in prayer seeking the Lord.

1. Daniel's concern for the people of God (Daniel 10:1-3)

*In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision.² At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks.³ I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over. We remember that in the first year of Cyrus' reign he issued a decree for the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem and invited the exiles to return home and to take with them the special objects for consecrated use that had been seized from the Temple. This event was approximately two years earlier. We know that Daniel had prayed earnestly for the exiles to have this opportunity to return home. It has now happened and the first large group of returnees are back home. Yet Daniel here is not dancing for joy; rather he is distressed at what is going on. Why was this so? (a) **First of all the limited number of returnees:** the early chapters of the book of Ezra give the details concerning this expedition. There were slightly less than 50,000 people making the trip. The total Jewish community in Babylon was much greater than that in number. Why were the majority happy to stay? We remember Psalms like Psalm 137 that speak about the distress and homesickness of the exiles. *By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.² There on the poplars we hung our harps,³ for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!'⁴ How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?⁵ If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.⁶ **May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy** (Psalm 137:1-6). Clearly many exiles a generation on were happy in Babylon. After all the vast majority of those who had been exiled as adults would have died in exile; those exiled as young children**

would have vague memories at best and many other adults had been born in Babylon. Jerusalem was not their ‘highest joy’. On so many occasions in every generation it is small minorities of people who have the vision and dedication to take on challenging callings that should have been accepted by many more people. (b) **Secondly, they faced significant opposition in the land:** In Ezra 4:4-5 there is a summary of what happened over many years as the returnees struggled to overcome the trials they faced. *Then the peoples around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building.*⁵ *They bribed officials to work against them and frustrate their plans during the entire reign of Cyrus king of Persia and down to the reign of Darius king of Persia.* Problems rarely come one at a time! Like buses several often come at once! It was not any one big thing but the dripping tap of discouragement. How often in God’s work do things take so much longer than we had hoped. Building projects and a range of other things for which Christians pray take years longer than is often envisaged. Persistence or perseverance is an essential asset for each person involved in a long-term project that is worth undertaking. (c) **Thirdly, Daniel is sad because he is not able to be there** He is an elderly man who although mentally very alert and still fulfilling all his official duties has come to the conclusion that the leadership of the work back in the land must be entrusted to emerging younger leaders. He is not disinterested - on the contrary he is praying earnestly for the success of attempts to restore a Jewish state with a capital city in Jerusalem. Later, possibly after Daniel’s death the enemies of the returnees got the project of rebuilding Jerusalem stopped until Nehemiah’s Governorship began, nearly a century after the initial returnees had started the work. What is important to remember no matter what the project is that it is a team effort in every area of church life; and likewise in the vast majority of work settings as well. Paul explained it very clearly to the church in Corinth. They had been quarrelling over which Early Christian leaders were ‘the best’ to follow. In I Corinthians 3:3-8 he writes: *You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?*⁴ *For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not mere human beings?*⁵ *What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task.*⁶ ***I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.***⁷ *So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.*⁸ *The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour.* In a context of a team effort Daniel may be doing fine in Babylon, but his heart is sad for those in the land of Israel enduring hard times. So he sets himself to fast and pray for them. All of us should be committed to intercessory prayer. However, praise God in particular for the believers who have a particular calling to intercessory prayer ministry for the Lord’s work. No-one ever needs to say there is no place for me in God’s work. We may not be able to be physical participants in a particular project, but we can always make it a priority prayer item.

2. **Daniel’s encounter with the representative of God** (Daniel 10:4-11)

⁴ *On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris,*⁵ *I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz round his waist.*⁶ *His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.*⁷ *I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; those who were with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves.*⁸ *So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless.*⁹ *Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.*¹⁰ *A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees.*¹¹ *He said, ‘Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.’ And*

when he said this to me, I stood up trembling. (a)**The figure seen by Daniel** (Daniel 2:5-6) Daniel in these verses is not at home in his regular city residence but staying in another place outside the city near the Tigris River. Was this a day trip or what today we might call a holiday? We will never know but it is probable that this was a quieter place away from the hustle and bustle of city life and work. In this context of peace and quiet God gave Him this extraordinary vision. It was a vision not a physical encounter from the words of Daniel 10:7: *I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; those who were with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves.* This vision has remarkable similarities to Revelation chapter one that contains a vision given to another faithful servant of God –John the apostle in exile for his faith on the island of Patmos. Note these words: ¹² *I turned round to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands,* ¹³ *and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash round his chest.* ¹⁴ *The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.* ¹⁵ *His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.* ¹⁶ *In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance* (Revelation 1:12-16). Did Daniel and John see the same figure? Biblical scholars are divided over the answer they give to it. Evangelical Scholars who say ‘no’ place weight on the significance of the words of Daniel 10:13 *But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days.* On their reading of this passage they say the heavenly figure must be Gabriel as a demonic figure no matter how powerful they were could not stand in the way of Jesus resisting His will for three weeks. By contrast, others reply that the details of the passage must not be pressed too strongly but there are sufficient clues to suggest that greater reverence is given here to this figure than would be due to an angelic figure. For example, in vs 16, 17 and 19 this figure is referred to as *my Lord*. In addition to the similarities to the encounter with the risen Jesus in Revelation 1 there is also an Old Testament passage worth considering here as well. In Ezekiel 1 there is information given about a vision of an encounter with heavenly beings. After the descriptions of the angelic figures the chapter then points to one who is more significant than them It states: ²⁵ *Then there came a voice from above the vault over their heads as they stood with lowered wings.* ²⁶ *Above the vault over their heads was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man.* ²⁷ *I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him.* ²⁸ *Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. **This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.** When I saw it, I fell face down, and I heard the voice of one speaking.* (Ezekiel 1:25-28). Ezekiel was a contemporary of Daniel. I believe although I cannot prove it definitively that both men of God had an experience of and encounter with the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus.

This figure was described as *a man dressed in linen* (Daniel 10:5). Interestingly in Leviticus 16:4 is a description of the clothing worn by Aaron when as high priest he enters the most holy place to make atonement for the sins of the people of Israel. It states: *He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash round him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on.* This figure was someone who mediated between the people and God. But Jesus was a priest who has greater than all before Him. Hebrews 7:23-25 states: *Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office;* ²⁴ *but because Jesus lives for ever, He has a permanent priesthood.* ²⁵ *Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, **because He always lives to intercede for them.*** The figure that I believe was watching over Daniel is the one that watches over you and me. He may use other figures such as angels to do His bidding but He loves and cares deeply for all those who have

faith and trust in Him. Do you? Daniel 10:11 states: *He said, 'Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.'* What a wonderful assurance it is to know that the Lord's love and kindness to us is constantly available. Recognition of this fact certainly kept Jeremiah going at the toughest time in his ministry. Lamentations 3:21-25 reminds us of this fact. *Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: ²² Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ²⁴ I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him.' ²⁵ The Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him;* what wonderful and encouraging words these are.

(b) **the impact made by the figure on Daniel** (Daniel 10:7-10) ⁷ *I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; those who were with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. ⁸ So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. ⁹ Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground. ¹⁰ A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees.* A person who has an extraordinary encounter with God or even one of His heavenly messengers cannot be the same again. Remember self-reliant old Jacob who finally yielded His life fully to the Lord during his extraordinary encounter with the Lord Jesus at the River Jabbok in Genesis 32:24-30. *So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶ Then the man said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.' But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' ²⁷ The man asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Jacob,' he answered. ²⁸ Then the man said, 'Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.' ²⁹ Jacob said, 'Please tell me your name.' But he replied, 'Why do you ask my name?' Then he blessed him there. ³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.'* For the patriarch a life-long limp was the reminder of his need to depend upon God. Compare the words describing Daniel's emotional response to the Lord's presence to that of John in Revelation 1:17-18: *When I saw him, I fell at His feet as though dead. Then He placed His right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. Jesus is Lord! Hallelujah! Daniel like John was overwhelmed at His presence. God has fellowship with those who are absolutely serious about fellowship with Him. This does not mean that we will necessarily ever have a vision like this because God deals with each of us personally and in accordance with our needs – as He sees it!*

3. **Daniel reassured about the importance of prayer** (Daniel 10:12-14, 20-21, 11:1)

(a) **An assurance about prayer** (Daniel 10:12)¹² *Then he continued, 'Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.* There are times when we get discouraged because our prayers appear to be unanswered. It is not just that we have not received the answer we sought, but worse than that in some respects, we feel as if God has ignored our heart's cry. Our feelings may be subjective and having a wrong perception of how God has viewed our prayers, but we cannot deny that there are some times when it feels that way. This passage of Scripture which is to some degree extraordinary and mysterious, yet is also profoundly encouraging, because it is as if God draws back a spiritual 'curtain' and gives us a very brief glimpse into what is really going on behind the scenes. God is on the throne and desires us to pray. There are times in the Bible not least in Genesis 18 where God actively sought Abraham's intercessory prayers concerning the fate of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is not going beyond the text of Scripture to suggest that somehow in His sovereign purposes God takes into account the prayers of His people in the working out of

His will in the world. When God sees a need for action in the world He actively looks to see if His people are concerned enough to intercede with Him about it. Isaiah 59:15b-16 is a classic text on this point. *The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. ¹⁶ He saw that there was no one, He was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so His own arm achieved salvation for Him, and His own righteousness sustained Him.* In the New Testament James in what was one of the first New Testament books written points to the impact of the intercessory ministry of Elijah as an example and encouragement to us. *Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops* (James 5:17-18). Who knows what God has in store for this church and this community if we persist in earnestly seeking Him?

(b) **An insight into the spiritual battle** (Daniel 10:13-14, 20-21, 11:1;) ¹³ *But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. ¹⁴ Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.* ... ²⁰ *So he said, 'Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come; ²¹ but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince. ¹ And in the first year of Darius the Mede, I took my stand to support and protect him.)* What I think is possible in this passage is that Daniel had a vision of Jesus but also encountered another heavenly being who spoke with him, for example Gabriel. What is clear, though, is that behind the physical events we observe on earth there are spiritual powers engaged in a serious battle for the hearts and minds of people on earth. Abraham Kuyper, a Dutch Reformed Church minister and a former Prime Minister of the Netherlands a century ago, wrote these words concerning this subject: If once the curtains were pulled back, and the spiritual world behind it came to view, it would expose to our spiritual vision a struggle so intense, so convulsive, sweeping everything within its range, that the fiercest battle even fought on earth would seem, by comparison, a mere game. Not here, but up there—that is where the real conflict is waged. (Sinclair Ferguson, *Daniel*, p. 215) Paul gives more details for us in Ephesians 6:10-20: *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled round your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.* In Romans 8:38 in his list of the things which cannot separate us from God's amazing love for us, Paul includes: *neither angels nor demons... nor any powers..* Isaiah makes a reference to this battle in the spiritual realms with these words in Isaiah 24:21: *In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below.* There are evil powers seeking to resist God's work and the advance of His kingdom and the heavenly beings who faithfully serve the Lord and seek to advance His cause. We must not let the excesses of some charismatic Christians turn us away from recognising the truth of this spiritual battle. What is most important to encourage us is contained in the words of I John 4:1-6: *Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² This is how you can recognise the*

*Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.⁴ You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, **because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.**⁵ They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them.⁶ We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognise the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.* When problems arise in churches as well as in the wider community there may be more to it than appears at first sight. There may be purely human explanations on some occasions but we must also be open to recognise that this passage and a small number of others in the Bible give us a glimpse of the spiritual battle going on behind the scenes.

4. **Daniel's encounter with the representative of God** (Daniel 10:15-19)

¹⁵ *While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face towards the ground and was speechless.*
¹⁶ *Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and began to speak. I said to the one standing before me, 'I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I feel very weak.*
¹⁷ *How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe.'*
¹⁸ *Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength.*
¹⁹ *'Do not be afraid, you who are highly esteemed,' he said. 'Peace! Be strong now; be strong.'* When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, *'Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength.'* The ministry of angels is something concerning which we have very limited knowledge, except to know from the Bible that it takes place. Hebrews 1:14 states: *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?* How we wish we knew more about it. Psalm 34 is a most encouraging passage of Scripture to strengthen us in times of adversity. Reading the opening seven verses is pertinent to our subject; *I will extol the Lord at all times; His praise will always be on my lips.*
² *I will glory in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice.*
³ *Glorify the Lord with me: let us exalt His name together.*
⁴ *I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears.*
⁵ *Those who look to Him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.*
⁶ *This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; He saved him out of all his troubles.*
⁷ ***The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and He delivers them.*** Daniel was strengthened through his trying times and God's people down the centuries will also receive similar blessings. This passage reminds me of Isaiah 6 when this royal courtier encounters God and is called into his special ministry as a spokesperson for God. In that passage Isaiah had become aware of his sinfulness but a heavenly being sent from God transformed both Isaiah and his circumstances before God. *'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.'*
⁶ *Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.*
⁷ *With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.'*
⁸ *Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'* (Isaiah 6:5-8) The revelation of God, followed by the encounter with the heavenly being removed the obstacle to his service for God. In the spiritual battles we face God's angels do watch over us as His people. Be encouraged because although here we have a glimpse of an intense spiritual battle. The final victory of God is assured –for our good and for His glory.