

## Preparing for Coming Conflict

Daniel 10

*"And the word was true, and it was a **great conflict**."*

**Introduction:** The Olympics always bring out the best (and sometimes the worst) in people. We have not watched as much as a family as in years past, but what draws us into this world competition is NOT only national pride (admittedly we root for a US athlete in sports we don't usually care about, but are deeply committed to for the 15 minutes per 4 years we watch tandem diving), but also for the human interest story about each athlete. The **preparation** over months and years is immense, especially for the swimmers who are teenagers. Waking up before their classmates, putting in hours of training while their friends enjoy other high school activities, and willingly disciplining their body for the goal of competing at the highest level. We've also seen this last week about the high level of **pressure** that these young people face, as even arguably the BEST gymnast in the world had to bow out for mental health purposes. This illustrates that what faces an Olympic athlete is an assault on their physical as well as mental discipline, and only a few come out as champions. Olympians are placed in **competitive conflict**, and the ones who are most prepared are in the best position to thrive in the fiercest competition.

In similar ways, we are in a time of **preparation** as we look forward to coming conflict. We have had an amazingly difficult last year and half, but if we thought those tough times were a thing of our past, we are sorely mistaken. We will be challenged both **physically and mentally**, but also, and most importantly, **spiritually together**. Multiple decisions, polarizing opinions, and inconsistent policies will continue to be the norm, and being ready to not only face but thrive in the midst will be imperative. From an earthly perspective, these are dark days, but from a Biblical perspective, it presents us with immense **opportunities**. We are reminded that people have always needed Jesus, but are hard to reach when comfort is high and needs are low. But since God is sovereign over all things, we see everything that happens as an expression of His will, purpose, and goals. So since our neighbors are feeling less secure than ever, the ground is more fertile to have **gospel conversations**, pointing people to the magnificent person and work of Jesus Christ and the eternal security that we can have through the **living hope of new birth** (1 Pet. 1:3).

This **preparation is so important because things are not going to get better**. This is not a pessimistic view of our government or nation, but out of a Biblical gaze into the future. This morning we are going to look at a chapter in Daniel that some have said is an "unpreachable" passage. **Daniel 10** is a chapter given to preparation. It is designed to prepare Daniel for what he would hear in Daniel 11-12. Daniel (and we) was given a vision for his near and distant future that included horrible atrocities, wicked rulers, and angelic battles. It is the type of message that would leave any person paralyzed, distraught, and depressed. So to counter this and prepare his mind and heart for what was to come, Daniel both prepared and was prepared. In understanding these **5 preparations**, we too can be ready for what is to come, whatever it may be and whenever it may come, to not only shine brightly, but also to fight against fear and anxiety about the future as continue to fulfill the mission God has for us.

### Overarching Explanation of What is Coming (1):

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a word was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar. And the word was true, **and it was a great conflict**. And he understood the word and had understanding of the vision.

Daniel 10:1 is really a summation for the next **3 chapters** in Daniel. It speaks to a **great conflict** or as some have legitimately interpreted it, a **great war**. It will lay out information already covered in Daniel, but in greater detail. It will trace history from Daniel's time to **Antiochus Ephiphanes**, but then stretches to OUR future with a view of **the Antichrist**. What we'll see is less of a symbolic vision (no strange animals) but direct revelation of kings, power players, and angels. This war and conflict would be fought both as an earthly war and a heavenly one, with flesh and blood participants and angelic host.

The timing is important to understand, as this chapter was written in **third year of Cyrus, King of Persia**, which would have been 535 B.C, or two years after the appearance of Gabriel in chapter 9 and about 2 years after Cyrus decreed the people could return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1). It was important that Daniel not only received the upcoming vision, but that he understood the word and the vision. Again, Daniel 10 gives the **preparation necessary for Daniel to be ready to both received and understand what was to come**. *Proper understanding of the future allows courageous living in the present*, and Daniel (like us) needed heaps and heaps of courage.

### **Preparation #1: The Feast of Prayer and Fasting (2-3)**

In those days I, Daniel, was **mourning for three weeks**.<sup>3</sup> I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the **full three weeks**

Daniel recounts his days leading up to receiving the vision in chapter 11 by telling about his response to confusion and perhaps a little disappointment. In the **3rd year of Cyrus**, one would have thought that life in Jerusalem would be back to United Monarchy standards, being the focal point of power in the region and restored influence in worship. However, only just over 42,000 of Israel moved back to Jerusalem, and when they got there, things were a mess. In fact, the people faced such stiff opposition, that all they could muster by this time was getting the foundation of the Temple laid, which lead to both joyful shouting and sorrowful weeping (Ezra 3:11-13). We might have thought that Daniel would have gone back with this crew, but at over **80 years old**, Daniel most likely thought his best use was to stay and continue to shape a pagan government. Whatever the reason, it was clear that what Daniel had thought would have happened after the **70 years of captivity did NOT come to pass**. *What's your typical knee jerk response when your expectations are not met? Anger? Frustration? General grumpiness?*

Daniel had a knee jerk, immediate response: **he prayed**. Do not miss nor downplay this simple yet profound cure for unmet expectations in life, both in the immediate and long term. Notice too that he prayed for **3 weeks, seeking the Lord for what was going on with his beloved people and God's plan**. Remember back in ch. 9:21, Daniel received an almost immediate response from Gabriel. Now, he had to wait (we'll see why he had to wait in a few verses). As he mourned and prayed, he began to **fast**, not by restraining from eating ANYTHING, but by NOT eating the delicacies that by now he had begun to freely eat (as opposed to his early teenage years). He did not anoint himself, meaning he stopped using body wash (not sure everyone else appreciated the fast!) or oil that would have been soothing and protective from the sun.

Fasting is a voluntary act by a believer who gives up our bodies strongest urge to eat in order to pursue and seek after God. Israel was only prescribed one fast per year during the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29-31), and everything else was up to individual. Fasting has been misunderstood by many, thinking that giving something up will MAKE me more acceptable to God or as a show of my devotion, when it truly is a personal commitment in earnest prayer and pursuing of God Himself. Apparently Daniel still ate to sustain himself, but gave up the time and comfort gained from other delicacies. Fasting comes out of a **hunger for God, to know Him and understand His will**.

**Preparation #2: The Awe of the Presence of God (4-9)**

On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris) <sup>5</sup> I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, **a man clothed in linen**, with a belt of **fine gold** from Uphaz around his waist. <sup>6</sup> His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of **lightning**, his eyes like **flaming torches**, his arms and legs like the **gleam of burnished bronze**, and the sound of his words like the **sound of a multitude**. <sup>7</sup> And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, and **they fled** to hide themselves. <sup>8</sup> So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me. My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. <sup>9</sup> **Then I heard the sound of his words**, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground.

God had communicated with Daniel through visions and dreams of others, but here He did so directly. After **3 weeks of praying and fasting**, he was visited by an unidentified Person. He was down by the Tigris River, most likely to be alone and away from the hustle and bustle of the city. What he saw left him **afraid and passed out on the ground**.

*Who was this messenger?* Whoever it was, it was in the form of a man, a person. Everything about this person gleamed and left Daniel with the impression of holiness and glory. Fine linen would have signified holiness, a belt of gold would have shown royalty, and beryl was like a transparent stone. His clothes were one thing, but his face was like **lightning**, **eyes like flaming torches**, legs like gleaming bronze, and his voice like a surround sound stereo. People around Daniel fled in fear as the vision was begun, and Daniel left faint-hearted.

There are **three main options**: **1)** A general yet unidentified angel and the same one identified in the rest of the chapter, but is NOT Michael; **2)** **Gabriel**, the messenger angel of chapter 9. The problem with this is Daniel was not afraid of Gabriel before. **3)** **A Theophany, or an Old Testament, pre-incarnate appearing of Jesus Christ**. The description of this "man in linen" is surprisingly similar to John's vision of Jesus in **Rev. 1:12-16**, and John's response in Rev. 1:17 was to fall at his feet as though dead. In fact, if we examine Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus in Acts 9, there are similarities to His interaction with Jesus. The main problem with this is that IF this is the same person as the angel in verse 10, it would show a weakness of divinity since that angel of verse 10 needed Michael's help in battling the Prince of Persia (10:13 - more on this in a second).

Here is what I believe. I believe this first man of linen WAS a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus, and then another angel (most likely Gabriel) was one who took up the vision in verse 10 and beyond. Daniel had an experience with the **glory of God in Christ, one that would mark him and prepare him for the vision of the future**.

Much like Paul and John, Peter saw the **transfigured Christ** (Matt. 17:1-13). Getting a glimpse of the immense, awesome, holy, and glorious Christ left Daniel speechless and afraid. Far too often we can take for granted the greatness of God when we lose the clear sense of His glory. We think entering into His presence is some sort of emotional experience brought on by music and lights, rather than engaging the way God always reveals Himself, through His Word by the guiding of His Spirit. We follow the same Christ that blinded and called Paul, that left John speechless and Daniel on the ground. We don't serve our buddy or One that we make into our image or that is more cuddly than holy. The perfect, glorious, and magnificent Christ IS the One that brings us to the Father, is approachable, but should never be lessened in our thinking or brought down in our worship.

**Preparation #3: The Delight of Divine Love (10-12)**

And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. <sup>11</sup> And he said to me, "O Daniel, **man greatly loved**, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. <sup>12</sup> Then he said to me,

**“Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words**

Now, after hitting the ground, another angel (Gabriel?), picked him up and encouraged him while he was still shaking on all fours. Here we see not only God's view and response to Daniel, but **how Daniel prepared Himself in prayer:**

Daniel sought to understand God's will and he did so by the means God provided. He **set his heart to understand**, meaning he was willing to do the work to understand. To truly understand God's will we must truly take the time to understand His Word, where He has clarified His goals and purposes for us. Daniel not only set his heart to understand but then was **humble** before the Lord to receive and accept what His will was. Daniel received **far more than he bargained for**, and was given more information than he asked, but it was because he was not trying to fit God in his will but truly resting in what God laid out for him.

Here is where we also see the **grace of God in the life of Daniel and by extension our own**. The angel reassured Daniel that he was **greatly loved, that he could stand up, did not have to fear, and that he was heard!** Listen, we know that we are not answered by God because we **ask wrongly, seeking God as a genie who will give us our passions** (James 4:3). God will not give us the things that we want if those are the things that take us away from our desire or dependency on Him. But he does respond to the lowly and humble of heart, will strengthen us and make our feet like the deer's to tread on high places (Hab. 3:19). This was the type of reassurance Daniel needed and that we must remember as we move into difficult futures.

#### **Preparation #4: The Awareness of Angelic Activity (13-14, 20-21)**

The **prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days**, but **Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me**, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, <sup>14</sup>and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the **latter days**. For the vision is for days yet to come.”

Then he said, “Do you know why I have come to you? But **now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia**; and when I go out, behold, the **prince of Greece** will come. <sup>21</sup>But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except **Michael, your prince**.

Now, things get really interesting. One of the reasons that Daniel did not receive the answer he was looking for was the fact that God's messenger was held up by an evil angel, identified as the **"prince of the kingdom of Persia"**. Not only this, but in order for this angel to get to Daniel to give him the vision of what is to come in the future, he needed the help of **Michael**, identified as one of the chief angels (and in Jude 9 is described as an archangel). Michael and Gabriel worked together in the angelic battles, and it seems like they were strong enough together to handle the opposition. Here is what we, and Daniel, learn about angelic activity:

- 1) **Angels are indeed real** - and they interact in two realms: with the unseen spiritual realm and the seen human realm
- 2) **There are both good and bad angels** - It was clear that the Prince of Persia and the coming Prince of Greece were NOT on the side of God nor His people
- 3) **Angels can influence the affairs and governments of mankind** - Persia, the world dominant power of the time, was heavily influenced by this Prince angel, one who battled with Gabriel and Michael. Greece was a coming power, and they were influenced by another specific demon. In other words, the leaders of the world are NOT operating independently, but are under the control and influence of the **Prince of**

**the power of the air** (Eph. 2:2), Satan himself. Behind dictators and policies are demonic host. Particularly, these demons are at war with the people of God and seek to thwart the Jewish nation and those who follow God. But notice that Israel had their own protector, **Michael**, who is called "Your prince" and "the great prince who has charge of your people" (Dan. 12:1). Michael is a protector of the nation of Israel, doing battle with other angels seeking to persecute God's people. This battle continues to rage even into the end times where Michael and his angels fight and defeat the great dragon (Rev. 12:7)

4) **There is an unseen battle that rages around us - all the time** - Ephesians 6 reminds us that we don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against **cosmic powers over this present darkness** (Eph. 6:12). We are aware that there is FAR MORE going on in the unseen realm than our enemy would ever want us to recognize. **What should we do about it?** Remember that Christ has put ALL THINGS under His feet (Eph. 1:20-21) and seated us with Him (2:6) so that we can **stand firm against his schemes**. Our enemy loses, but just like a snake's head right after its cut off can still deliver a death blow, our enemy is vigilant and like a crouching lion, seeking to devour the unsuspecting. We should be assured by the power Jesus has exercised over these spiritual forces, and we have dispatched forces fighting on our behalf.

#### **Preparation #5: The Power of Divine Strengthening (15-19)**

When he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and was mute. <sup>16</sup> And behold, one in **the likeness of the children of man touched my lips**. Then I opened my mouth and spoke. I said to him who stood before me, "O my lord, **by reason of the vision pains have come upon me**, and I retain no strength." <sup>17</sup> How can my lord's servant talk with my lord? For now no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me."

18 Again one having the appearance of a man touched **me and strengthened me**. 19 And he said, "O **man greatly loved, fear not**, peace be with you; **be strong and of good courage**." And as he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me."

Daniel was God's prophet, and his job was to speak on behalf of God, particularly the vision he was about to receive. His problem: *he had no strength, no breath left in him, so he could not speak*. Fear gripped him, the vision was overwhelming, and the task seemingly impossible. He needed encouragement, strength, and help in moving forward. **Have you ever felt that? You don't share about Christ because you are afraid? You can't communicate hope because your present seems overwhelming or hopeless. You feel like you have nothing left after just managing life to do anyone any good?**

Notice that the angel gave Daniel exactly what he needed. He touched his lips, much like the angel did to Isaiah in Isaiah 6:6. God made our mouths and gives us a message to give. He also has given us the Holy Spirit who promises to give us the words to speak in the moment we need them (Matt. 10:19-20; Luke 12:12), which means we must have the Word stored up in our minds and hearts (this is the basis of both evangelism and counseling). The angel also told him to **be strong and of good courage**, exactly how God counseling Joshua when entering the Promised Land (Josh 1:8). Strength and courage do not come out of personal strength or discipline, but out of the assurance of the authority and presence of Christ (Matt. 28:18, 20). When we remember that God will never command us to do ANYTHING that He does not also supply the grace to do it, we are freed up to be strong and courageous.

So Daniel prayed and fasted, was given a glimpse of the glory of God in Christ, was reminded of God's divine love, that he was protected by angelic host, and that he was given strength to accomplish his task: *this was all done to prepare him for the vision he was about to receive*.

For us this morning, the question we ask and answer is this: ***are we prepared for what God has for us?*** *Are we prepared to give an answer to those who ask us the reason for the hope that we have? Are we ready to see the trials we face as opportunities to grow in our trust and dependency on God Himself? Are we ready to see what happens in our government is being shaped by angelic forces, and are we prepared to stand firm? Are we prepared to receive and humbly accept what God shows us about the future, and face it with joy? Are we ready to face the upcoming conflict and war both physically and spiritually, fighting the good fight of faith?*