

Messiah in Daniel 10

Background

There are many interpretations of Daniel 10-12, maybe because Daniel 11 is very difficult to understand. Even historians have a hard time finding historical equivalents to the events described in this chapter. Could it be that scholars have been looking in the wrong era?

The purpose with the next few newsletters is to show that Daniel 11 actually is very uncomplicated and systematic. The key to understanding this chapter is *not* to look for historical fulfillment but to carefully follow the pattern of the passage. As we do, we will find that the interpretation of the last vision is surprisingly simple and very Christ-centered.

The World Order

From Daniel 2, 7 and 8 we know that the order of the four world powers is Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and finally Imperial Rome. This knowledge is valuable when we come to Daniel 11. Daniel 10 gives the background to the vision with details about the encounter with the heavenly being. Daniel 11-12 contains the actual message.

Babylon is already fallen when this vision is given and the second world power, the Medo-Persians, rule. It is quite remarkable that Daniel, a Hebrew captive, who was a very high official in the Babylonian Kingdom, was left alive when the Medes conquered Babylon. High officials were often killed by the occupying forces. But not Daniel! He continued to be a man of highest honor also in the Persian Empire according to Daniel 1:21 and 6:28. God certainly had a purpose with Daniel. Let's read the introduction in Daniel 10:1:

*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. (NIV)*

Scholars have debated about how many visions Daniel experienced. In previous chapters the vision and the understanding of the vision are separated but given at the same occasion – but not so here. This becomes clear when we read a few more verses.

Revelation

At first a “revelation” was given to Daniel. Other translations write that a “thing was revealed,” or a “message was revealed,” etc. This revelation was so significant that it stirred up the deepest parts of Daniel. We see from his behavior that he understood part of the message, but not all of it. Daniel was a man of God, who was used to seeking God for understanding. As usual he humbled himself before God, Daniel 10:2-3:

*At that time I, Daniel, mourned for **three weeks**. 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. (NIV)*

Daniel did not fully understand the revelation by himself. That is why he turned to God for help. Besides praying he also started a partial fast and abstained from gourmet food, meat, wine, etc. For his “outer” appearance he humbled himself by not using lotions. His actions show that he took the matter of the initial revelation very seriously. This is confirmed by the heavenly being in Daniel 10:12:

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.” (NIV)

God heard Daniel’s prayers the first day, but as we will see later, it took some time before He intervened. From a human perspective it seemed like a “delay” but of course God’s timing is perfect. He knows the end from the beginning and works accordingly.

The True Message

Even if Daniel did not have a full understanding of the “revelation,” he knew how to summarize it. We find the summary in Daniel 10:1. This is very important to recognize! Often, in a Hebrew text, the summary comes first followed by a more detailed description (Luke 18:1, Romans 14:1, etc). If the description or explanation does *not* agree with the initial summary, we have missed the true meaning.

The first part of the summary says that “its message was true.” At first I smiled as this question quickly came to my mind: *Lord, why do You say that this revelation is “true?” Is not everything in your Word true? If You wanted to emphasize that certain passages really are true, why didn’t You use the word “true” in connection with the creation story or with the story about Noah and the flood? Why not emphasize the truth of all the passages that people struggle with and have a hard time believing?* No that is obviously not the reason it is used here. By the way; I personally believe that all Scripture, the whole Bible is true and inspired by God. Thus, it must be a deeper meaning to this word.

If we study the word “true” or “truth” in the Bible, we quickly understand that this word is part of God’s character, Jeremiah 10:10. It becomes even more interesting when we look at Daniel 10:1 in the original language. It does not say that “its message *was* true” but simply “its message true.” Some Bible translations put all *added* words in *italics*. In Daniel 10:1 the word “*was*” is in italics i.e. it is added. In the phrase “its message *was* true” the added word “*was*” makes the phrase refer to the *content* of the revelation. I.e. the content is “true” as opposed to “false.” However, without the word “*was*” this phrase points to something else.

Hebrew Word for Truth

It is intriguing to look at the Hebrew word for “true” or “truth.” The first letter in the Hebrew word is the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet. The last letter in the same Hebrew word is the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Thus the word “true” makes us think about “Alpha and Omega,” which is found in the book of Revelation. Alpha is the first and Omega the last letter in the Greek alphabet. Jesus Christ says that He is the Alpha and Omega, Revelation 22:12-16.

Could the summary of the “revelation” in Daniel 10:1 also indicate that the focus in the passage is on Christ, the Messiah? In John 14:6 Jesus frankly tells His listeners that *He is the “truth.”* If Christ is the Truth in the New Testament – would He be the Truth in the Old Testament also? The good news is that we don’t need to speculate. Hebrews 13:8 says:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (NIV)

This indicates that Christ is “the Truth” in the Book of Daniel as well. In that case the summary of the “revelation” in Daniel 10-12 is not primarily referring to the message being *true* in contrast to *false*, but it says that Jesus Christ *is* the message! Therefore, the Messiah *is* the focus also in this part of Daniel just as we have found Him to be in Daniel 8 and 9.

A Great Conflict

The summary in Daniel 10:1 also says that the “revelation” that Daniel received “concerned a great war” (NIV). This translation may at first appear somewhat controversial, especially to those who are used to the KJV. But let’s compare a few different translations. The NKJV says: “and the appointed time was long” but the footnote shows the literal option; “and of great conflict.” In the NRSV we read: “it concerned a great conflict,” ESV: “it was a great conflict,” YLT: “the warfare [is] great,” NASB: “great conflict,” ASV: “a great warfare” and AMP: “great tribulation (conflict).” The phrase “the appointed time was long” (KJV) is not in the dictionaries so I don’t know where that expression came from.

If we look up the Hebrew word in the Brown-Driver Brigg’s Hebrew lexicon, we find possible translations like: “army,” “host,” “war,” “warfare,” etc. Therefore, most translators seem to have chosen “war” or “conflict.” This is certainly not the only place in Daniel where the word “war” is used. Daniel 9:26, 11:10 and 25, also mention the word “war” and in Daniel 12:1 phrases like, “time of distress,” “time of trouble,” “time of anguish,” etc. are used. Remember, it says it concerned a “great war.” The word *great* makes this war to stand out and consequently refers to something extraordinary.

It seems we are standing on solid ground when we summarize the “revelation” given to Daniel by saying that it concerned a “great war” or a “great conflict” and that the word “truth” points to the Messiah. The last part of Daniel 10:1 says that “the understanding came to Daniel in a vision.” Thus, the detailed explanation that follows needs to be in harmony with this summary.

The Vision

When Daniel had the initial “revelation” he understood the big picture but not the details. Therefore, he humbled himself before the LORD “for three weeks,” Daniel 10:2. This time span should be seen as three literal weeks and lasted for “twenty-one days.” That is the time it took until Michael came to answer Daniel. Daniel 10:13:

*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. (NIV)*

After Daniel had prayed and humbled himself before God for three weeks, he was out with his men. I am very pleased that the Bible mentions this fact, since the reaction of Daniel’s men powerfully emphasizes the divine magnitude of this vision. Daniel was probably on duty for King Cyrus of Persia. Because of how his men react we can assume that they were not godly men. This vision must have been quite dramatic, both for Daniel and his men. When Saul met Christ on the road to Damascus, his men heard the voice but didn’t see anything, Acts 9:7. Maybe it was similar here, Daniel 10:7:

I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. (NIV)

This was clearly a supernatural event, experienced by all who were with Daniel. His men did not “see” the vision but somehow they must have realized that something very extraordinary was happening. Maybe they heard something. We are told they were overwhelmed with great fear, then fled and hid. Their reaction indicates a heavenly presence powerful enough to “scare” them away. The being Daniel encountered in this vision, is described in Daniel 10:4-6:

*On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a **man dressed in linen**, with a **belt** of the finest gold around his waist. His **body** was like chrysolite, 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. (NIV)*

In front of Daniel was “a man dressed in linen.” Later on this “man” spoke to Daniel and explained the message in detail. If it had not been explained to Daniel, we would not have much understanding of this last vision. The explanation covers two chapters, a total of 58 verses, and the description of the “man” is described in three verses. Let’s look at how this “Man Dressed in Linen” is portrayed.

The Man Dressed in Linen

Who is this “man dressed in linen” that Daniel encountered on the bank of the great river Tigris? The Newberry Bible is unique in that it shows the grammatical emphasis, tense, etc. in the original Hebrew or Greek languages. According to this Bible, the “man” in this verse is the true emphasis and therefore the word “MAN” is capitalized. This “MAN” Dressed in Linen remains with Daniel throughout the vision and talks to him until the very end of Daniel 12. In Daniel 12:5 we encounter “two others,” also heavenly beings, who very likely are two accompanying angels.

Daniel 10:4-6 describes the Man Dressed in Linen. The linen-dress was probably similar to the robe the priests used to wear. It was white and reached to his feet. According to the text he had a “belt of the finest gold,” “His body was like chrysolite,” “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.” Interestingly, there is another place in the Bible where a very similar “man” is described.

We find him in Revelation 1:12-15 where a heavenly being is described that looked like “a son of man,” “his face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance,” he had “a robe reaching down to his feet,” “a golden sash (belt) around his chest,” “his eyes were like blazing fire,” “his feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace” and a he had a voice “like the sound of rushing waters.”

Daniel’s Reaction

In the passage from Revelation John “fell at his feet as though dead.” The same thing happened to Daniel! The passage in Revelation is commonly understood to refer to Jesus Christ. Therefore, I believe that the Man Dressed in Linen also refers to Christ. Daniel 10:8-9:

*So I was left alone, **gazing at this great vision**; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly **pale** and I was **helpless**. Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a **deep sleep**, my face to the ground. (NIV)*

Daniel was truly affected as he encountered the “Man Dressed in Linen” – but when Daniel *heard* Him speaking, it was too much for him. He became unconscious. The reason for this is clear. Daniel describes what he heard as “the sound of a multitude.” The “sound of a multitude” and the “sound of many waters” are descriptions of what God’s voice sounds like, Revelation 1:15, Jeremiah 10:13 and 51:16. No wonder that Daniel fainted! At this moment he needed help. Daniel 10:10-11:

*But then a hand touched me and roused me to my hands and knees. He said to me, “**Daniel, greatly beloved**, pay attention to the words that I am going to speak to you. Stand on your feet, for I have now been sent to you.” So while he was speaking this word to me, I stood up trembling. (NRSV)*

The Bible does not clearly say whose hand touched Daniel. Since no “new” being has been introduced, we have the right to assume that the hand belongs to the Man Dressed in Linen. Especially since in Daniel 10:16 and 18 the same procedure is repeated. These two verses specifically say that it was “one who looked like a man” that touched him. So very likely it was Daniel’s Messiah, here described as the Man Dressed in Linen that continued to speak and act.

Comforted

It is obvious that Daniel needed more than mental and spiritual support. He had been awakened from his unconsciousness and helped up on his feet. He was still trembling, afraid and possibly confused. Just imagine then how comforting it must have been for Daniel to hear the words, “Daniel, you who are highly esteemed,” as it is written in the NIV or, “O Daniel, man greatly beloved,” as the NKJV puts it. Certainly, very soothing for his trembling soul!

After these comforting words, the Man Dressed in Linen continues to speak. We may be used to thinking that a “vision” is like looking at a “movie screen” in front of us. Therefore it may be difficult in this technical age to imagine that this “man” stepped out into real life and touched Daniel. This is, however, no problem seen from heavens perspective. The “man” Daniel encountered both spoke and acted. As I mentioned earlier, this far Daniel 10 has not introduced any other heavenly being besides the Man Dressed in Linen.

Daniel, however, continued to tremble. The next few verses show that he was not yet ready to receive what was about to come. The Man Dressed in Linen continued to speak to Daniel with the purpose of explaining the initial “revelation” he had been given three weeks earlier, Daniel 10:12:

*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.**” (NIV)*

The Man Dressed in Linen first explained what happened during the three weeks when Daniel humbled himself and prayed for divine wisdom. Every time we humble ourselves before God, we can be absolutely sure that He hears our prayers. We read: “Your words were heard” and we are told that the Man Dressed in Linen came in response to them. It would be nice to always get responses to our prayers right away, wouldn’t it? But even Daniel, a man highly esteemed by God, had to wait for the divine response. The reason for the delay is given, Daniel 10:13:

*But the prince of the kingdom of Persia opposed me **twenty-one days**. So Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, and I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia. (NRSV)*

When God intervenes there is always opposition from the evil side. Therefore, it is no surprise that it takes a while for the plan of God to be fully implemented. But don’t think for a moment that the devil is as powerful as God is. Not at all! The reason for the delay must be understood from another perspective. God does not violate a human being’s free choice. Instead, He arranges circumstances around us that give us opportunity to make correct choices at the right time. I believe that is the case in this prophecy as well.

Summary

- The last prophecy in the Book of Daniel is found in Daniel 10-12.
- In Hebrew writings the summary often comes first followed by a detailed description.
- First Daniel received a “revelation” and three weeks later the explanation came to him in a “vision.”
- The summary of the whole prophecy states that it concerns the *Truth* (=Jesus Christ) and a *great war*.
- The Man Dressed in Linen is Daniel’s Messiah, namely Jesus Christ.