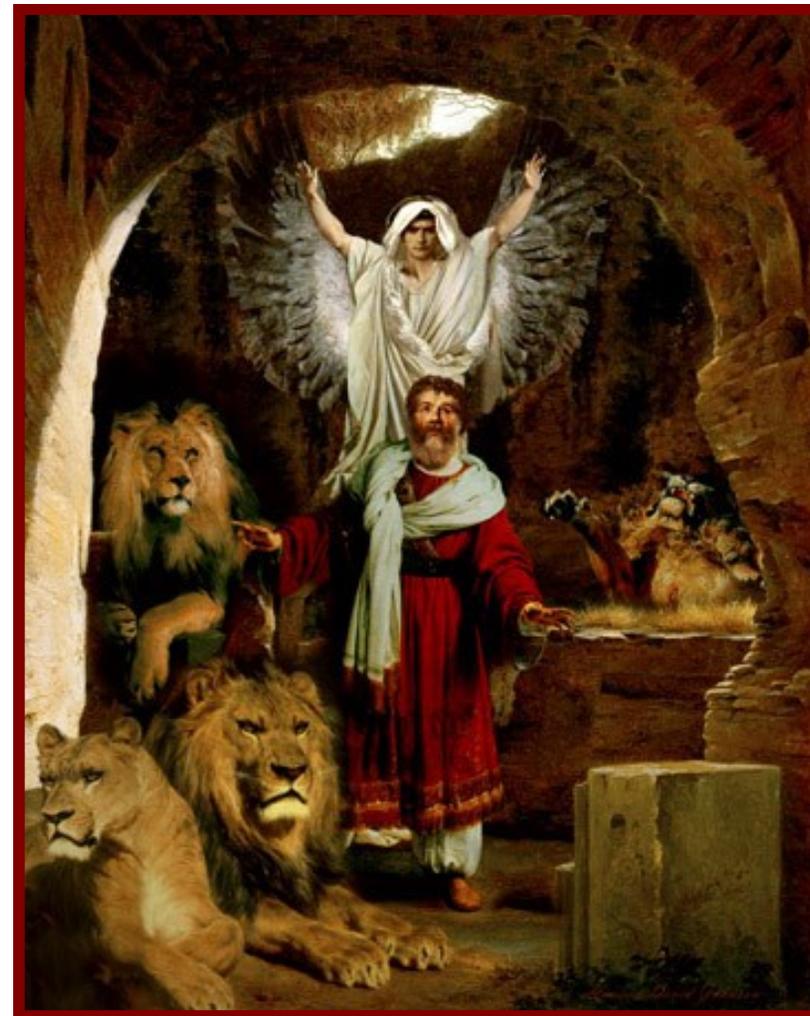


The Book of Daniel

Chapter 10



The Book of Daniel, as it now stands in the ordinary Hebrew Bibles, is generally divided into two main parts. The first includes a series of narratives which are told in the third person and the second, a series of visions which are described in the first person. From its content it readily appears that the Book of Daniel does not have as its objective a summary historical account of the period of the Babylonian Exile, or of the life of Daniel himself. The contents of the Prophecy of Daniel are of a peculiar kind which has no exact parallel in the Bible, except in the Apocalypse of St. John.

Commentary of the Book of Daniel is by Saint Jerome. St. Jerome, who was born Eusebius Hieronymus Sophronius, and is the most learned of the Fathers of the Western Church. The Church regards him as the greatest of all the doctors in clarifying the Divine Word. While at Rome he made a revision of the current Latin New Testament, and of the Psalms. Then he undertook to translate most of the books of the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew. The only parts of the Latin Bible, now known as the Vulgate, which were not either translated or worked over by him are the Books of Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and the two Books of the Maccabees. In the sixteenth century the great Council of Trent pronounced Jerome's Vulgate the authentic and authoritative Latin text of the Catholic Church, without, however, thereby implying a preference for it above the original text or above versions in other languages. In 1907 Pope Pius X entrusted to the Benedictine Order the office of restoring as far as possible the correct text of St. Jerome's Vulgate, which during fifteen centuries of use had naturally become altered in many places. The Bible now ordinarily used by English-speaking Catholics is a translation of the Vulgate, made at Rheims and Douay towards the end of the sixteenth century, and revised by Bishop Challoner in the eighteenth century. The Confraternity Edition of the New Testament appearing in 1950 represents a complete revision.

Chapter 10

Verse 1. *"In the third year of Cyrus, King of the Persians, a word was revealed unto Daniel, who was surnamed Belteshazzar, and it was a true word and great strength. For there is need of understanding in a vision."* And how is it that we read at the end of the first vision, "And Daniel lived until the first year of Cyrus the King"? Well then, we understand that he enjoyed his former high position among the Chaldeans and was clothed in purple and fine linen right up until the first year of King Cyrus, when Cyrus overthrew the Chaldeans, and afterwards Daniel commenced service under Darius, the son of Ahasuerus of the Median line, who reigned over the kingdom of the Chaldeans. Or else, indeed, that Darius had already died in whose first year Daniel had learned of the mystery of the seventy weeks, and he is now relating that he beheld these things in the third year of King Cyrus. "And it was a true word and great strength" refers either to the strength of the God who was going to perform these things or to the strength of the prophet who would comprehend them.

"And no one is my helper in all these things except Michael, your prince." He implies, "I am that angel who presents thy prayers to God, and I have no other helper in petitioning God on your behalf except the archangel Michael, to whose charge the Jewish nation has been entrusted. And meanwhile the prince of the Greeks is engaged in a common effort with me at this particular time, contending against the prince of the Persians. We should review our ancient history and consider whether by any chance that was the date of the conquest of the Persians by the Greeks. According to the Vulgate edition (of the Septuagint), this same vision is reckoned as extending to the end of the book, that is, the vision which appeared to Daniel in the third year of Cyrus, King of the Persians. On the other hand, according to the Hebrew original, the ensuing sections are separate from this, and recorded in an inverted order. The causes for this phenomenon we have already mentioned; that is, the matters here recorded are related as having occurred in the first year of the Darius who overthrew Belshazzar, not in the third year of Cyrus.

End of Chapter 10

Verse 19. "And as he spoke with me, I recovered strength and said, 'Speak, my Lord, for thou hast reassured me' And he said. ..." For unless the angel had reassured him by touching him like a son of man, so that his heart was freed of terror, he would not have been able to hearken to God's secrets. For that reason he now says, "Speak, for thou hast reassured me; for thou hast enabled me both to hear and understand what thou sayest."

Verse 20. " 'Dost thou know why I have come to thee? And now I will return to fight against the prince of the Persians.'" What he means is this: I have indeed come to teach thee of the things thou hast received in answer to prayer; but I am going to return once more to contend against the prince of the Persians in the sight of God, for he is unwilling that thy people be released from captivity.

"For (Vulgate: Therefore) as I was coming away, the prince of the Greeks appeared and entered in (Vulgate: and came up)." He means, "I myself was departing from God's presence in order to announce to thee [reading *tibi* for the inappropriate *ubi*] the events which are to befall thy people in the last days; and yet I am still not secure, since the prince of the Persians stands to plead against the granting of thy petitions and the acceptance of my advocacy on thy behalf. And behold, the prince of the Greeks, or Macedonians, had just come, and he entered in before God's presence to lodge accusation against the prince of the Medes and Persians, in order that the kingdom of the Macedonians might succeed in their place." Truly marvelous are the secret counsels of God, for it indeed came to pass that after the Jewish people had been freed from captivity, Alexander, king of the Macedonians, slew Darius and overthrew the kingdom of the Persians and Medes, so that the prince of the Greeks did overcome the prince of the Persians.

Verse 21. "Nevertheless I will relate to thee what has been set down in the Scripture of truth." That is, this is the order which the words follow. The fulfillment is still in doubt. For even though thou dost beseech the Lord and I present thy prayers to Him, yet the prince of the Persians takes his stand on the opposite side, and is unwilling that thy people be freed from captivity. But because the prince of the Greeks has come, and in the meantime is contending against the prince of the Persians, and also because I have Michael there as my assistant, I shall, during their mutual conflict, report to thee the coming events which God has foretold to me and has bidden me relate to thee. And let no one be disturbed by the question as to why mention is made of the prince of the Greeks or *Hellenes* rather than of the Macedonians, for Alexander, king of the Macedonians, did not take up arms against the Persians until he had first overthrown Greece and subjected it to his power.

Verses 2, 3. "In those days I, Daniel, mourned for the days of three weeks; I ate no desirable bread, and neither flesh or wine entered into my mouth; neither was I anointed with ointment until the days of three weeks were accomplished." By this example we are taught to abstain from the pleasanter types of food (I think that the term "desirable bread" is that inclusive) during a period of fasting, and that we neither eat flesh nor drink wine, and especially that we desire no anointing with ointments. This custom is maintained among the Persians and Indians even to this day, that they use ointment as a substitute for baths. Also, Daniel afflicted his soul for three consecutive weeks, so that his intercession might not appear cursory or casual. By inference, indeed, we ought to make the observation that a person in mourning who bemoans the absence of one betrothed partakes of no desirable bread though it comes down from heaven itself; neither does he touch solid food, which is to be understood in the sense of meat, nor does he drink any wine, which gladdens the heart of man, or make his face cheerful with oil (as we read in the Psalms: "That he may make the face cheerful with oil" Ps. 103 [=104]: 15). By means of such a fast as this the betrothed girl sheds tears which will be convincing, when her fiancé has been taken from her. Daniel also did well to supplicate the Lord with boldness, inasmuch as in the first year of Cyrus's reign the captivity of the Jews had already been somewhat relaxed in its severity.

Verse 4. "And in the twenty-fourth day of the first month, I was beside the great river which is the Tigris." Ezekiel also had seen a great vision beside a river, the Chebar (Ez. 1). And it was by the stream of the Jordan that the heavens were opened to the gaze of our Lord and Savior and also to John the Baptist (Matt. 3). Therefore those critics should leave off their foolish objections who raise questions about the presence of shadows and symbols in a matter of historical truth and attempt to destroy the truth itself by imagining that they should employ allegorical methods to destroy the historicity of rivers and trees and of Paradise [mentioned in Scripture].

Verse 5. "And I lifted my eyes and saw." We must lift up our eyes if we are to be able to discern a mystical vision.

"And behold, a person clothed in linen." Instead of "linen," as Aquila rendered it, Theodotion simply puts *baddim* [a mere transcription of the Hebrew word], whereas the Septuagint renders it as *byssus* [fine linen], and Symmachus as *exaireta* (choice vestments), that is, "distinguished clothing" (*praecipua*). And instead of what we have rendered as, "Behold, a man," on the basis of the Hebrew text, Symmachus puts, "One like unto a man," inasmuch as he was not actually a man but only had the appearance of one.

"And his loins were girt about with pure gold." The Hebrew term for this is *'wpz* or *ophaz* [actually pointed as *'u"paz* in the Massoretic Text], a word which Aquila has rendered in this fashion: "And his loins were girt about

with the color of *ophax*" [a Greek word which does not otherwise exist].

Verse 6. "*And his body was like chrysolite.*" (F) | 113 For "chrysolite," one of the twelve gems inserted in the oracular breastplate of the high priest, the Hebrew has *trs'ys* (tharsis) [actually *tarsi's* or *tarshish*], a word which Theodotus and Symmachus simply left unchanged in transcription; but the Septuagint called it "the sea," according to the usage in the Psalms: "With a violent gale Thou dashest the ships of *Tharsis* in pieces," i.e., "the ships of the sea" (Ps. 47:8). Jonah, also, was desirous of fleeing, not to Tarsus, the Cilician city (as most people suppose), substituting one letter for another, nor to some region in India (as Josephus imagines), but simply out to the high seas in general (Jonah 1).

Verse 7. "*And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me saw it not; but an exceeding great terror fell upon them, and they fled away and hid themselves.*" The Apostle Paul had a similar experience in the Book of Acts, in that while the others could see nothing, he alone beheld the vision (Acts 22).

Verse 10. "*And behold, a hand touched me, and lifted me up upon my knees. ...*" The angel appeared in the form of a man and laid his hand upon the human prophet as he lay upon the ground, in order that he might not be terrified, beholding a form like his own.

Verse 11. "*And he said to me, 'Daniel, thou man of desires. . . .'*" It was fitting that he be addressed as a man of desires, for by dint of urgent prayer and affliction of body and the discipline of severe fasting he desired to learn of the future and to be informed of the secret counsels of God. Instead of "man of desires," Symmachus rendered it as "desirable man." The term is apt, for every saint possesses a beauty of soul and is beloved by the Lord.

Verse 12. "*And he said to me: 'Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day when thou didst set thine heart to understand and to afflict thyself in the sight of thy God (variant: thy Lord), thy words have been heard and granted, and I have come forth in response to thy words'*" (Vulgate: on account of thy words). On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, that is, of Nisan, after three weeks or twenty-one days had elapsed, he beheld this vision, and he heard from the angel that on the very first day he had begun to pray and to afflict himself before God, his words had been heard and granted. The question arises why, if he had been heard, was the angel not sent to him right away. Well, by reason of the delay an opportunity was afforded him of praying to the Lord at greater length, so that in proportion as his earnest desire was intensified, he might by his effort the more fully deserve to hear [or else: "might deserve to hear more, i.e., than he would otherwise"]. And as for the angel's statement, "And I have come in response to thy words," his meaning is this: "After thou didst begin to invoke God's mercy by good works and tearful supplication and fasting, then I for my part embraced the opportunity of entering in before God and praying for thee."

Verse 13. "*But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me for twenty-one days.*" In my opinion this was the angel to whose charge Persia was committed, in accordance with what we read in Deuteronomy: "When the Most High divided the nations and distributed the children of Adam abroad, then He established the bounds of the nations according to the number of the angels of God" (Deut. 32:8). These are the princes of whom Paul also says: "We speak forth among the perfect a wisdom which none of the princes of this world knew. For if they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of Glory" (I Cor. 2:6). And so the prince or angel of the Persians offered resistance, acting on behalf of the province entrusted to him, in order that the entire captive nation might not be released. And it may well be that although the prophet was graciously heard by God from the day when he set his heart to understand, the angel was nevertheless not sent to proclaim to him God's gracious decision, for the reason that the prince of Persia opposed him for twenty-one days, enumerating the sins of the Jewish people as a ground for their justly being kept in captivity and as proof that they ought not to be released.

"*And behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to my assistance.*" That is, while the angel of the Persians was resisting thy petitions and my representations on thy behalf as I presented thy prayers to God, then there came to my assistance the angel Michael, who has oversight of the people of Israel. By chief princes we are of course to understand archangels.

"*And I remained there close by the king of the Persians.*" He designates the angel or prince by the term "king of the Persians," and shows that he had tarried with Michael for a little as he spoke in opposition to the prince of the Persians.

Verse 14. "*And I have come to teach thee what things shall befall thy people in the last days.*" The very petition which Daniel had requested is the thing which he deserves to hear from God, namely what is going to happen to the people of Israel, not in the near future, but in the last days, that is, at the end of the world.

Verse 16. (A) "*O my lord, at the sight of thee my joints are loosed. ...*" Theodotus interprets it this way, in accordance with what we read in the One Hundred and Second Psalm [i.e. the 103rd]: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name." For our inward nature must direct its gaze without, before we deserve to behold a vision of God; and when we actually have beheld a vision of God, then our inward nature is converted within us and we become wholly of the number of those concerning whom it is written in another Psalm: "All the glory of the daughter of kings is within, in golden borders" (Ps. 44:14).