

Daniel 10 & 11

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Date: 14 December 2025

Preacher: David Helm

[0:00] How are your Christmas preparations coming along?! Do you feel ready?! What remains on your to-do list?
! Meals yet to be made?! Gifts yet to get? The truth is this. Christmas is celebrated best by those who make preparation for it.
The truth is that the depth of our rejoicing will depend on the degree of our readiness.
And so, I ask you, how are your preparations for Christmas coming along? Are you ready? I want to argue from this text of all texts, Daniel 10.
That we find a man being made ready for Advent. Let me pray. Our Heavenly Father, we wait on the arrival of your Son.

[1:12] And I ask that even now, your word would penetrate our hearts and minds. In Christ's name, amen. Interestingly, when we meet Daniel on the pages of chapter 10, He finds himself longing to be released from exile.
He actually has just learned in chapter 9 that while 70 years are complete and the people were prepared to return to Jerusalem, nevertheless, it would be 70 sets of seven before a full atonement would be made, before the vision and the prophecy would be sealed.
And so, we actually meet a man here on the pages of Scripture who is yet anticipating Advent, coming, arrival.
Think of the hymn that was chanted in the Gregorian moments of the 8th and 9th century for the first time.
O come, O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel who mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appears.

[2:39] They were singing that in the 8th century on the backside of Christ's arrival longing for his second one. And Daniel, some 1,500 years before, is singing the same thing in our chapter.
He's awaiting the coming of Emmanuel. And so, as a result, we learn from him how to prepare, how to wait.
And what do we find him doing? Notice chapter 10. He's spending over three weeks in prayer. My Bible reads that 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. That opening line covers the terrain all the way through the close of the book in chapter 12.
It's a word that's not revealed in its content until chapter 11. That while he's longing to be released and to see God come in the midst of his people, he's learning that there's more great conflicts yet to come.

[4:00] And it says in verse 2, In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all for the full three weeks.

Daniel, as he awaits the end of an exile, that he knows won't conclude until great conflicts yet emerge into the future.

We find him praying. We find him mourning, don't we? We find him lamenting. His concern with his lament and his longing isn't revealed until verse 14, where the angel says, I've come to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days.

This is the content of his prayers. He is preparing for Advent in the midst of longing for what God's plans are for his own people.

Evidently, Daniel didn't return to Jerusalem. When Cyrus signed his edict, some two years before, evidently Daniel stayed as God's people began to make their way back to the homeland.

[5 : 31] Some 42,360 of them had set out, among them 1,000 horses and mules, 435 camels, 6,720 donkeys, at least according to Ezra's record keeping.

We are removed now in this chapter from Daniel's years of public ministry of word and prayer, from the early days of Darius Mead, when he had gotten thrown into the lion's den.

You are now back some 68 years from his early sermons to Nebuchadnezzar. And after all this, he's still longing, still mourning, still waiting, still asking God, well, what about the future?

When do you come? Oh, come. Emmanuel. So we're right to ask ourselves, how are we preparing for Christmas?

Do we have a heart that breaks over the condition of the church? Put that on your list. Sometime each day in prayer for the remaining 11 days.

[6 : 48] Some moments, 15 or more per day, when I lament the condition of God's people. Sometime when I am actually in prayer asking the Lord to restore the fortunes of the church, before his second advent.

It's not normally on our list of preparation, but it would be helpful to us all. Notice he's not mourning over the culture, which is most often what we mourn over.

The world has gone awry. You know, he's mourning over the state of the church. He's praying over concerns for her future. These are the preparations he's making on the front side of Christmas.

Your heart wedded to his is mine. Are we able to sing with the hymn writer, in the tumult of our souls, I love thy church, O God.

Her walls before thee stand. Dear as the apple of thine eye, engraven on thy hand. For her my tears shall fall.

[8 : 11] For her my prayers ascend. To her my toils and cares be given. Till toils and cares shall end. This is what he's doing to prepare.

Remember, celebration of Christmas is enjoyed most by those who prepare for it. That the rejoicing on Christmas morning is deepened because of the lament and the longing that precedes it.

For sorrow does last for a night. But if all we do in the remaining 11 days to prepare for Christmas is to make sure that our gifts are purchased, our meals are made, our invitations are set out, we're neglecting that moment, that solitary, individual, private moment where we sit.

He sat for three weeks and three days. We have 11 days. Say at some portion each day, may I sit like Daniel of old, long for the church to be strong, and long for him to come, long to be released from an exilic-like existence.

But, that's not the only way he's preparing for Christmas. It's not just an aspect of devoting some time to pray. Notice, he's also catching a glimpse of the risen, reigning Christ, long before that infant incarnation day.

[9 : 54] Take a look here with me at verse 4 and following. On the 24th day of the first month, I was standing on the bank of the great river that is the Tigris.

I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from ufahs around his waist. His body was like barrel.

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.

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.

What does he see in the midst of his prayers? He's suddenly beholding a portrait of the living Christ.

[10 : 52] And all the imagery here references back to Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2, with this great towering image where the stone actually takes everything away.

Or later in Daniel 7, when the Son of Man is wedded to the Ancient of Days, and God himself revealed as the one who sits on the throne.

Let me just say it as concretely and simply as possible. You've got 11 days to get ready for Christmas. Catch a glimpse of where Jesus is presently seated.

This is what happens to John the Baptist. Not John the Baptist. John, the writer of the Apocalypse and Revelation in chapter 1. He writes in a time of tribulation, in a time of great conflict, and he knows the kind of picture the church needs as they wait for his return.

And what he sees is exactly the same kind of vision. That's what we need. Meditate on that. How do you get that vision? You read about it.

[12 : 05] I would encourage you in the coming days, look for portions of Scripture that present Christ in his present state. For while the church is languishing and waiting, the sun has risen and he is reigning.

And as you pray, longing for his coming, you ought to read the Scriptures concerning where he is. High and lifted up, exalted king, defeater of death, our only hope, the forgiver of our sins, the one who gives his word and power and spirit.

He abides with us. He's one who never forsakes us. Meditate on it. Read of him. See him. For as you see him exalted and lifted up, you're prepared to meet him in the manger, in his infant cradle.

I think of the elderly among us, and I count myself there. We ought to resemble at this season of life, Simeon, Anna of old, of whom Luke writes, that in his aged state, he still found his way to the temple regularly, in the spirit, in prayer.

It says longing for the consolation of Israel and not wanting to die until he saw the face of his Lord, and then Jesus is carried into the temple.

[13 : 47] As an infant, the spirit makes known to him, this is the one, and he takes Jesus in his hands, and he begins to praise God because his own eyes have seen him.

Have your eyes seen him? Not only in his present state reigning, but in the fact that he has come for the redemption and the consolation of Israel.

Are you like Anna of old, who comes daily before the Lord in the spirit? It says she was, in a sense, longing for the redemption of Jerusalem.

So here is an old pair of birds banging around the temple in Jerusalem. Simeon, longing for consolation, consoling work of Israel.

Anna, praying, ministering in the temple, longing for the redemption of Jerusalem. Daniel of old, seeing the very portrait of the risen Christ, and in all his glory, they behold him in all of his infancy, and they now are ready to praise the Lord.

[15:01] They're prepared to praise because they have prepared for it. Prayer and reading.

How about us? How are our preparations for Christmas coming along? Will we be ready?

Let me add to your list things to be done. Pray with lament, longing, consolation of coming.

Read with intentional vigor, strength, all the portraits in the scriptures concerning his future reign, his present reign, his infant glory, and take it all in.

For as we pray and as we read, we are being prepared for his arrival. And that's not all.

[16:04] Look at what happens next. He realizes in verse 6, 8, and following that there's no strength in him.

I find this fascinating. Here's a man longing for Christ to come, praying with great intensity over a long period of time, seeing for himself the portrait of the risen Christ.

But when he sees him, no strength was left in him. His radiant appearance was fearfully changed. He retrained, it says, no strength.

And then it says, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground. The preparation for Christmas is going to require a third means of preparation.

It's what I would just call actively waiting. You know how a kid waits for Christmas? That's active waiting.

[17:17] How many more days? Is it Christmas yet? When do I get to open the presents? When do grandpa and grandma arrive?

Are they bringing something with them? Nothing's really taking place, but they're waiting with anticipatory strength. And Daniel, at this moment, falls on his face.

He has no strength to bring about Christ's coming, but he just waits. And notice verse 10. A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees.

Oh, Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words I speak. Stand upright, for now I've been sent to you. So I stood up. Boy, even the image there is beautiful by way of preparation.

Go from being on our face over the next 11 days, longing for things in the church, rising on our knees as we see the risen Lord in the scripture.

[18:21] Standing as he provides us strength, readiness for his day. Knowing that we are loved. And then he begins, notice, this strengthening and touching occurs three times.

Down in verse 16. Behold, one like the children, a man touched my lips. Then I opened my mouth and spoke, and I said to him who stood before me, O Lord, by reason of the vision, pains have come upon me.

I retain no strength. There's no readiness yet. How can my Lord's servant talk with my Lord? For now no strength remains in me.

No breath is left in me. And again, notice it, third time now, verse 18. One having the appearance of a man touched me and strengthened me.

And I said, Lord, let my Lord speak for you have strengthened me. This active waiting is waiting on God to strengthen you in preparation for his arrival.

[19 : 35] This is what Isaiah proclaims in Isaiah 40, which is also about consolation of Israel, the comfort that would come. Young men do grow weary and fall and lack strength.

But those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. They will rise on their feet. In fact, they will fly like eagles for the Lord will strengthen them.

Are we preparing, actively waiting for the strengthening of the Holy Spirit to alter our hearts in readiness for his arrival?

Certainly, this is what is needed. It was needed for Daniel. It's what we need. And guess what? It's what Jesus himself needed to accomplish the work God had given him.

Luke chapter 22 and in verse 23, when he's in the Garden of Eden, it claims that as he's praying three times over, having to help his disciples stay through the night, it claims that an angel came and strengthened him.

[20 : 53] Oh, might that strength which accompanied Christ to complete his own earthly work be your strength as you actively wait on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

This is indeed the way in which we prepare for Christmas. It's not just about the events you have to get to.

It's about the prayers you're to make. It's not simply about the books you're going to buy or read to children and grandchildren. It's about this book which you are to read and meditate on his present reign, his infant rule, his cross work in which he was strengthened.

It's about waiting actively and asking. I think again of one of those stanzas.

Oh, come thou day spring. Come and cheer our spirits by thine advent here. Spence the gloomy clouds of night and death's dark shadows put to flight.

[22 : 18] Joyce. Joyce. Emmanuel. He's come to comfort captive Israel. Our heavenly father, we ask even this morning that we would be like Daniel of old.

We would possess within our own spirit spirit a lament over what we perceive to be the inactivity of your strength in the world.

Help us to pray with longing for your advent. Help us to catch a glimpse of your beauty, your glory, your reign, your infant humility, your persevering hope.

And help us, oh Lord, to be strengthened so that come Christmas morning our joys would be doubled because our preparations for readiness were made.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.