

Series Daniel

Scripture Daniel 10:1-11:1

The prophecies in the Book of Daniel were revealed progressively over many years. Each new vision built on previous information. In chapter 2 Daniel was given a general overview of the future. He learned that there would be four world empires which would, in some form or other, exist until the end of the age, at which time all those empires would be destroyed by God and replaced with an everlasting heavenly kingdom.

Additional details about the four empires were revealed in later chapters. Chapter 7 described the empires from the perspective of heaven. They were pictured as four great beasts, each one more hideous, vicious, and blood-thirsty than the preceding one. The visions in chapters 7 and 8 introduced us to a specific individual who would rise to a position of immense earthly power and influence, who would become so vain that he would set himself up against God and vent his wrath on the people of God.

Daniel was not always able to distinguish between the fulfillments of near term prophecies and fulfillments which would be in the far distant future. For example, in chapter 7 he saw in his vision that “the Ancient of Days” (God) pronounced judgment on the ruler who was waging war against the saints. This would occur at the very end of the age. In chapter 8, Daniel was informed that there would be an especially evil ruler who would emerge from the third empire, from Greece. This ruler would also make a determined effort to destroy the religion of the Jews. In the explanation given by the angel Gabriel, Daniel was informed that this Grecian ruler, whom we know as Antiochus Epiphanes, who ruled over Palestine from 175 to 164 BC, would have the same evil intentions and behaviors as the ruler at the end of the age.

These two visions highlighted different aspects of time, the distant future and the intermediate future. What Daniel did not understand was that Antiochus Epiphanes was a picture of the person who would be judged by God at the end of the age. Like Daniel, we need to recognize that descriptions of near term events are sometimes an indication of what will happen much much later in time.

Daniel had a great and continuing desire for clear understanding about these matters, and he prayed for enlightenment. In response to his prayers, the angel Gabriel was sent to give him “insight and understanding.” This included a time line which was referred to as the “seventy ‘sevens.’”

From Gabriel’s explanation Daniel was able to comprehend the fact that there would be both incredible spiritual blessings which would come to the Jews and the holy city, but also that there would be future “times of trouble.” He learned that the Jews would face an indeterminate period of time of intense persecution. There would be warfare until the end of the age. The religious practices of the Jews would be terminated by an evil ruler. The temple and city would again be destroyed. *(See Daniel 9:22-27)*

There is a persistent emphasis in the visions in the book of Daniel on conflict and brutality. These are the main characteristics of the four human world empires, which represent the “times of the Gentiles.” The “times of the Gentiles” will be a very long period of pain and distress for all people on earth, and especially for the Jewish people.

Daniel’s concern for the future well-being of his fellow Jews increased with each one of the visions. I think this was the reason why he often “was deeply troubled in his thoughts,” and why he “was exhausted and lay ill,” and “was appalled by the visions” he saw *(Daniel 7:15, 28; 8:27)*. It must have been difficult for Daniel to face up to the truth of all that was going to happen to his people in the future.

Chapter 10 is the introduction to the last vision given to Daniel, and this vision covers chapters 10, 11, and 12. Verse 1 in our reading calls our attention once again to the theme of conflict. The message given to Daniel concerned “a great war.” However, you will notice that chapter 10 introduces us to a new level of conflict.

Read Daniel 10:1-11:1

This vision was given to Daniel in the third year of Cyrus’ rule over Babylon. At this time Daniel would have been about 85 years old. This would have been a couple of years after the first group of exiles had returned to Jerusalem. It was probably a year or so after Daniel’s experience in the den of lions, which, as you will recall, was the result of animosity and hatred toward him.

Verse 2 states that Daniel had undergone the discipline of three weeks of mourning and fasting. Verse 12 indicates that he had done this in order “to gain understanding.” Daniel had received lots of information from God in visions, and he was still trying to process and make sense of everything which had been previously revealed to him.

Verse 4 indicates that his days of mourning and fasting were in the first month of the year. In the Hebrew calendar, this would be in the spring. The Jewish Passover was on the fourteenth day of this month, and this was followed by the feast of Unleavened Bread from the fifteenth through the twenty-first days. The Jews were generally unable to practice their traditions during their years in captivity, so, it is probable that Daniel with a few companions had gone to an area near the Tigris River in order to keep, as best they were able, the Jewish religious tradition. The observance of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were incorporated into Daniel’s time of fasting and mourning.

The identity of the man who appeared to Daniel is uncertain. He had human characteristics but also had attributes which surpassed those of any mere man. Some commentators think it was Jesus because the description is similar to the person seen by the Apostle John in the book of Revelation (*see Revelation 1:12-15*). Other commentators insist that it had to be an angel since the Lord Jesus would not have been hindered by the creature referred to as “the prince of the Persian kingdom” nor would Jesus have needed the help of an angel. I am inclined to think it was an angel, sent by God as the angel Gabriel had been sent on a previous occasion.

Daniel was more profoundly impacted by this particular encounter than by any of his previous visions. He was, in fact, so overwhelmed by the presence of this messenger that his countenance changed and he had no physical strength.

There are a few other examples in the Old Testament of individuals who had such an encounter with angelic beings, and in every case they experienced an overwhelming sense of self-inadequacy, unworthiness, and dread. It was often necessary for these individuals to be supernaturally strengthened before they could understand God’s message.

In Daniel’s case, the angel had to touch him three times (*see verses 10, 16, 18*) before he regained enough strength to stand on his feet and be able to hear and respond to what the angel wanted to say to him. In addition, the angel urged Daniel two times to “not be afraid,” and to “be strong” (*verses 12 and 18*).

The part of this chapter that I most want to focus on begins in verse 12. The angel had been dispatched by God on the first day that Daniel had “set his mind to gain understanding.” God’s response to Daniel’s prayer had been immediate, but there had been a delay in the arrival of the angel. An entity identified as the “prince of the Persian kingdom” had opposed the messenger angel, resulting in a three-week delayed arrival.

In fact, it was only with the help of another angel, Michael, that the messenger angel was finally able to be with Daniel. The inference is that the messenger angel would never have made it to Daniel without help from his powerful ally.

We need to identify the “princes” mentioned in this passage, and to determine their roles in the events which were taking place on earth. We can infer that the “princes” were supernatural beings, just like or similar to the messenger angel who appeared to Daniel. In verse 13 Michael was described as “one of the chief princes, and in verse 21 as “Daniel’s prince.” In chapter 12 he is identified as “the great prince who protects the Jewish people” (*Daniel 12:1*). In the book of Revelation he is the angel who leads the heavenly army in battle against Satan and Satan’s forces and successfully casts them out of heaven (*Revelation 12:7-9*).

It would appear that the princes of Persia and Greece (*verse 20*) are fallen angels who oppose the actions of God. The “prince of the Persian kingdom” had great power, as evidenced by his ability to resist God’s emissary for twenty-one days and even make it necessary for Michael to provide assistance. The Bible does not provide many details about angels, but it is known that a large group of them followed Satan when he rebelled against God, and, hence, they, like Satan, are opposed to God’s sovereign will and activity. From this passage we can deduce that Satan has assigned some of his evil angels to particular geographical and political areas in order that they might stir up trouble against the people of God.

As I said earlier, one of the prominent themes in Daniel’s visions is conflict. All of the conflict described previously in this book was on the earthly level — it was human against human. In chapter 10 we get a peek into the conflict which rages in the heavenly realm. This is warfare at the spiritual level.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Church in Ephesus, helps us to understand what this means. He wrote, “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” (*Ephesians 6: 12*). Paul wanted his readers, including us, to know that it is not human opponents who are the real and ultimate enemies of God’s people. The more significant cause of spiritual opposition is unseen evil spiritual forces.

The “rulers,” “authorities,” “powers,” and other “forces” that Paul mentioned have “personality,” which means that they can think, scheme, devise plans, exercise their powers, and set traps in order to ensnare people in their evil ways. They are not limited to physical (flesh and blood) characteristics. Their powers far exceed human abilities. They are supernatural beings.

We can’t see what is going on in the realm of angels and spiritual beings, but, as believers, we can take comfort in the kind of protection that God has promised us. In the letter written to the Hebrews, the author explained that God’s “angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation” (*Hebrews 1:14*). It is remarkable what God is doing for believers.

There is a wonderful illustration of how God uses His angels to protect His people in II Kings chapter 6, where we read that the king of Aram sent a large contingent of soldiers to capture the prophet Elisha. When Elisha’s servant became anxious about this situation, he was told by Elisha, “Don’t be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Then Elisha prayed, “O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.” “Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he ... saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” This is an example of how the “ministering spirits” of God surround and look after “those who will inherit salvation” (*II Kings 6:15-17*).

In our western culture, especially since the beginning of the era known as the Enlightenment, most people discount the existence of a spiritual realm in which there are angels and demons and Satanic influences. Most westerners acknowledge the possibility of God dwelling in a somewhat “fuzzy” and “mystical” realm they call heaven, but they consider a belief in the spirit world to be foolish, superstitious, and irrational. Western culture assumes that cause and effect relationships can be explained in scientific, biochemical, or logical ways. Westerners are generally skeptical about the reality of the spiritual world, but according to the Bible, there are angels both good and bad, and there is a spirit world that influences our world.

In verses 12 and 14 the angel had said, "I have come in response to your desire to gain understanding about the future," and "I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future." The angel had then described his battle with the "prince of the Persian kingdom." The angel used his experience to explain the truth of spiritual reality to Daniel. In verse 20 the angel asked Daniel a question which seems superfluous in a quick casual reading, but, in fact, verse 20 is the key point in the passage.

The reality of battles in the spiritual realm was new information for Daniel. The angel's statements introduced him to a spiritual dimension he had not previously considered. The real reason that the angel appeared to Daniel was to inform him about spiritual conflicts in the heavenly realms. Yes, the angel would "tell Daniel what is written in the Book of truth" concerning the earthly "times of the Gentiles," but his greater and deeper message was about spiritual warfare in the heavens.

The princes of Persia and Greece were fallen angels who represented Satan's plans and interests. Satan used these evil angels in his efforts to thwart the plans and purposes of God. God had been steadily and progressively making His intentions known to humanity since the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. His plans had been revealed to numerous individuals throughout the Old Testament, including, among many others, Noah, Abraham, Moses, judges, kings, and prophets. Daniel was one of the most privileged of the prophets because of the extensive amount of information which was given to him during his lifetime. The point here is that Satan was not unaware of God's plans and purposes. In fact, he was undoubtedly more aware of God's intentions than any of the Old Testament saints, and he was continually positioning his angels in political and geographical spheres to oppose what God intended to do. What is remarkable is the unanticipated ways in which God carries out His intentions even when the devil throws up all the roadblocks.

We need to remember that the main theme in this book is the sovereignty of God. In spite of the opposition of evil forces on earth and in the heavenly realms, the plans of God were not, and will never be, changed. On earth, God overruled Nebuchadnezzar when he tried to burn the three young Jewish men in the blazing furnace. God had prophesied that the Babylonian empire would be replaced by the Medo-Persian empire, and that was accomplished in the best defended city in the world without a physical battle.

Let me mention one more curious example. In the very last statement in our reading the angel mentioned that he had taken a “stand to support and protect Darius the Mede.” We don’t know what difficulties Darius faced after he was appointed ruler over the former Babylonian empire, but in order for the Jews to be protected and the purposes of God to be accomplished, the angel had to fight against the “prince of Persia” and provide aid for this king even though he was a pagan. Perhaps the angel’s support had to do with the decree which allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem in fulfillment of God’s prophecies to Jeremiah. Perhaps the angel was referring to his protection of Daniel in the den of lions. Perhaps it was related to the decree of Darius that everyone in the kingdom should “fear and reverence the God of Daniel” (*Daniel 6:25-27*). The devil took a hit on all of these occasions. We don’t know why the angel made the statement about Darius the Mede, but the point is that the outcome was successful on earth only because matters were settled in the heavenly realm.

The angel who appeared to Daniel had already been engaged with “the prince of the Persian empire” for more than three years, and he was aware that he would, in the future, be engaged with the Satanic emissary who would be over Greece. Scripture makes it clear that warfare among supernatural powers will continue until the end of the age. As long as there will be conflict on earth, there will be conflict in heaven, because events on earth are influenced by activity in heaven. The angel wanted Daniel to understand that behind the many details of prophecy relating to the history of the Jews there is the unseen struggle of good angels against bad angels to ensure the accomplishment of the will of God. This is a truth we need to understand.

More than in any other way, God’s plans have been revealed to us in Jesus. Satan did everything he could to thwart the ministry of the Son of God. Satan thought he had won the contest with God when Jesus died on the cross. However, the resurrection of Jesus was the evidence of heaven’s great victory over the powers of evil.

The power of Satan was broken in a spiritual battle in the heavenly realms, but the battle there is still working itself out here on earth, and will continue to do so until the end of the age. In this present age, the followers of Jesus are expected to exercise their victory benefits by advancing the kingdom of God on earth. We do this by resisting the influence of evil, obediently following the risen Lord Jesus, knowing that God has His spiritual forces ministering to us. Let us keep declaring the good news of the ultimate victory of God’s kingdom.