

“WALKING IN THE SHADOW OF THE ANTICHRIST”

“Principalities and Powers” (Daniel 10:1-21)

The next vision is just a few years after the one in chapter 9. This vision will take up the remaining three chapters from 10-12. It is the last of his great prophetic revelations. It will build on the visions Daniel has received previously. Chapter 10 sets the background to the reception of the vision and gives us an insight into the spiritual battles in the unseen world between the forces of good and evil. Chapter 11 sets out the detail of the vision and the final chapter 12 is a postscript and the end of the book.

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a thing was revealed unto Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar; and the thing was true, but the time appointed was long: and he understood the thing, and had understanding of the vision. (v1)

Daniel is a very old man now in the third year of Cyrus. He must have been somewhere between 85-90 years of age at least. The Persians, under Darius the Mede (he was seemingly Cyrus' appointed ruler in Babylon), had initially appointed him one of the 3 presidents that ruled the Empire (Daniel 6).

The first year of the reign of Cyrus in 538 BC was very significant. For this was the year that the 70 years of captivity was brought to a conclusion and the return from the Exile began,

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:1-3)

In the British Museum in London there is a famous clay cylinder discovered in 1879 by Hormonz Rassam during excavations at Babylon. It dates from the time of the Babylonian conquest. In this clay is an inscription of a law in cuneiform script issued by Cyrus. It states,

“...I am Cyrus. King of the world. When I entered Babylon...I did not allow anyone to terrorize the land...I kept in view the needs of the people and all its sanctuaries to promote their well-being...I put an end to their misfortune. The Great God has delivered all the lands into my hand; the lands that I have made to dwell in a peaceful habitation...”

Daniel did not return with the 42, 360 exiles (cf. Neh. 7:66) who had returned to Jerusalem in the first return. Likely, he was too old or had other work that he couldn't leave Babylon, We do know that he had just been appointed two years previously to a senior office as a president under Darius in Daniel 6. However, we can be sure that his heart longed to be in Jerusalem.

At the end of his long and faithful life, the Lord revealed one last great vision to Daniel. This vision we are told, “*was true, but the time appointed was long.*” Later on in the chapter it is made clear that this is for the end times, “*Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days.*” (v14)

In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled. And in the four and twentieth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, which is Hiddekel; (v2-4)

Daniel is in a period of intense mourning with fasting for 21 days around the time of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12). Prayer and fasting complement one another spiritually, as both are linked to a denial of self. Andrew Murray observed, “Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible. Fasting is the other hand, the one with which we let go of the visible.” We are not told exactly why he is fasting at this time but clearly there is a deep burden on his heart over his people. What is clear is that he was concerned as to how to understand the details of the future because the angel mentions this, “*the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.*” (v12)

A further reason for the fast may be related to the fact that so few Jews returned from Babylon as the 42,360 or so represented a small fraction of the Jews living in Exile. Daniel would have been surely heartbroken that so few were interested in returning to the Promised Land and so many preferred the comforts and splendor of the worldly Babylon. He also may have been mourning over the future tribulations his nation had to face that he had learned in the previous visions or it may be related to the lamentable state of Jerusalem and the un-built temple at this time. This was what touched other godly men like Nehemiah, “*And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.*” (Neh. 1:4) Despite all his incredible achievements in the political world of two great Empires, Daniel was still deeply burdened for his people. All through that time there was no answer from heaven about his earnest intercession. But that was about to change.

Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz; His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground. (v5-9)

As Daniel came to the end of this long fast, the Lord sent a messenger to Daniel in a vision. This man had a glorious appearance. This startled not only Daniel but also all those that accompanied him. The men fled and Daniel was left alone. Daniel seemingly fainted, “*there remained no strength in me*” and “*and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground.*” He seemed to turn as white as a sheet, “*for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption.*” The description of the appearance of this man is suggestive that he was a pre-incarnate

appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ (also referred to as a Christophany). In the Book of Revelation, the Apostle John meets Christ in a similar form,

And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. (Rev. 1:13-15; cf. Ezekiel 1:26-28))

Another clue that this may have been Jesus Christ was Daniel's reaction. He had seen angels before like Gabriel but he had never fainted. Whereas Daniel's reaction here is identical to that of John when John met the Lord Jesus (cf. Isaiah 6:5; Ezekiel 1:28; Job 42:6; Joshua 5:13-14; Acts 9:3-5). If this was the Saviour, then the other heavenly person in v10 and v16 must have been a mere angel. Daniel had visions of the coming of Christ in Daniel 2 as a great stone to destroy the Gentile kingdoms. Now he has the greatest privilege in meeting Christ in His glory as Commander in Chief of the Angelic host. It's a good reminder to Daniel and to us that the Lord Jesus Christ is the centre of all history. All prophecy is tied up in His glorious kingdom. It is not about antichrist – it's about Christ!

And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands. And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling. Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. (v10-12)

Another angelic being reached down to touch the prostrated Daniel, “*And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands.*” He reminds Daniel for a second time that God has a high regard for him, “*Daniel, a man greatly beloved.*” The Lord has a deep interest in the spiritual wellbeing of His children. In the Book of Job, the Lord pays a great tribute to the character of Job, “*And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?*” (Job 1:8)



The presence of this angel on a personal errand, “*understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent*” seemed to frighten Daniel more, “*And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling.*” Before delivering the message from God, the angel spoke gracious words of comfort, “*Fear not, Daniel.*”

This angel had been sent as a specific answer to the prayer of Daniel, “*for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.*” The question naturally arises: ***If God has perfect knowledge of everything then why should we pray?*** The simple answer is because He tells us to and that settles the merits of the exercise (Matthew 6:9; Luke 18:1; Hebrews 13:18; James 1:5). God puts meaning into our lives not futility so there is clearly meaning in praying. In His wisdom, God has Sovereignly ordained that our prayers are to be part of His working out of His glorious plan for this world. There are obvious benefits to prayer for us. One of the most obvious is that prayer works. Daniel’s answer to prayer here is a striking illustration of this principle. Other illustrations of this are all over Scripture. Prayer can even change the course of men and nations. It really matters! In 2 Kings 19 when Sennacherib came against Jerusalem, Hezekiah prayed, “*O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand.*” In the next verse Isaiah came with God’s answer, “*Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard*” (2 Kings 19:19-20 cf. 1 Sam. 1:19; Matt. 7:7).

The answer to Daniel’s prayer may have been delayed for 3 weeks but God eventually answered in His time and in His way. What an encouragement to prayer this is. God’s delays do not mean His denials. He is not delaying because He is reluctant to help us but to change us. William Gurnall rightly observes, “Never was a faithful prayer lost. Some prayers have a longer voyage than others, but then they return with their richer lading at last, so that the praying soul is a gainer by waiting for an answer.” We are called not only to pray but also to persist in prayer. The Lord Jesus taught in Luke 18 that, “*men ought always to pray, and not to faint.*” The Bible is full of examples of believers persisting in prayer and the Lord answering prayer. The Psalmist promises us that the Lord, “*will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer*” (Psa. 102:17). All of us, no doubt, have our own story of frustrations in prayer. We need to remember that God will answer our prayer in His time and in His way. That is why He is the sovereign God. Sometimes He makes us persist in prayer to test us and teach us not to take Him for granted. Prayer never changes God but it changes us. Are you weary in praying? Persist by faith in prayer. The answer is on the way. Perseverance in prayer is often the key to victory!

But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia. Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days. (v13-14)

The angelic messenger then gave an amazing explanation to Daniel why the answer took 21 days to arrive. He reveals that he was specifically hindered, “*But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days.*” Now this prince could not be a man as no mere human could resist an angel of God. The most likely explanation is that, “*the prince of the kingdom of Persia*” is a demonic spirit that exercised authority and influence over the Persian Empire. Satan probably delegated this role for this particularly powerful demon to inhibit the people of God in Persia and to promote wickedness there. In Ezekiel 28 it is revealed that Satan was behind the king of Tyre. It is not unreasonable to deduce that the same is true today. Powerful demonic powers likely influence and control governments, corporations, and influential tools of entertainment

like the media, Hollywood, and the arts world. Hence, their thoughts, words, actions are not just the result of human decisions and activity.

This is a fascinating insight into the invisible spirit world around us. There is much more to this universe than meets the naked eye. Clearly, there are battles between the agents of hell and the agents of heaven in the affairs of men. We are in a continual war with the world, the flesh, and the devil. The Christian pilgrimage is not a playground but a battlefield against powerful, real, invisible demonic forces. No wonder Daniel collapsed multiple times as the full reality of this dawned on him. His 21 days of prayer and fasting took a great toll on him. Wrestling with these principalities and powers in agonizing intercession was not easy. This revelation into the invisible spiritual conflicts was not unique to Daniel. Elisha was fully aware that God's forces were with the people of God and were superior to the devil's forces. He assured his servant, "*Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.*" (2 Kings 6:16). To strengthen the faith of his weaker servant we read, "*And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.*" (2 Kings 6:17)

These demonic forces often utilise human agency but we should never become so focused on the human element that we miss the supernatural power behind it. Pritchard makes a helpful observation,

Sometimes we focus on the abortionists, the pornographers, the godless politicians, the corrupt business leaders, the drug dealers, and the purveyors of filth, as if they were the source of our problems. Yet those people are unwitting dupes of powerful spiritual forces that they know nothing about. They are morally culpable for their choices, yet there are also in the service evil beings who influence them in ways they do not realize.

This incident in Daniel 10 is not an isolated one. For instance, the Apostle Paul makes clear, "*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*" (Eph. 6:12) He explained to the Corinthians, "*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*" (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Col. 2:15) Clearly the kingdom of darkness is organised and powerful. They should not be ignored or underestimated. 21 days of determined opposition to powerful heavenly angels is not something to be lightly dismissed! It took the assistance of an archangel like Michael to tip the scales in favour of this angel. Paul even describes satanic opposition in his labours, "*Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.*" (1 Thess. 2:18; cf. 1 Cor. 15:32) Revelation 12 even details a battle between the same archangel Michael and the fallen angels. The commentator, Gleason Archer explains the balance of power between God and these demonic agents,

The powers of evil apparently have the capacity to bring about hindrances and delays, even of the delivery of the answers to believers whose requests God is minded to answer. God's response was immediate, so far as his intention was concerned. But "the prince of the Persian kingdom" (Daniel 10:13) —apparently the satanic agent assigned to the sponsorship and control of the Persian realm—put up a determined opposition to the actual delivery of the divine answer. While God can, of course, override the united

resistance of all the forces of hell if he chooses to do so, he accords to demons certain limited powers of obstruction and rebellion somewhat like those he allows humans. In both cases the exercise of free will in opposition to the Lord of heaven is permitted by him when he sees fit. But as Job 1:12 and 2:6 indicate, the malignity of Satan is never allowed to go beyond the due limit set by God, who will not allow the believer to be tested beyond his limit (1Cor 10:13).

The angel reveals also that he needed assistance to overcome the demonic prince of Persia, “*but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.*” Michael is a chief angel or archangel who appears to be delegated by God the responsibility to minister to and defend the nation of Israel. He’s a kind of guardian angel of the Jews. God uses angels to minister to the needs of God’s people, “*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*” (Heb. 1:14) It was angels that took Lazarus to Abraham’s bosom on his death in Luke 16:22. Israel might not have been a powerful nation at that time on the world stage but it was the most powerful nation in heaven because God and His angels were behind them. Ultimately, that’s all that matters.

And when he had spoken such words unto me, I set my face toward the ground, and I became dumb. And, behold, one like the similitude of the sons of men touched my lips: then I opened my mouth, and spake, and said unto him that stood before me, O my lord, by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength. For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? for as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me. (v15-17)

The revelation of the great battle in the heavenlies concerning the answer to his prayer stunned Daniel again. He collapsed prostrate to the ground unable to even speak. Once again the angel strengthened him and he was able to function. Daniel speaks and reveals he has a sorrowful burden for the future of his people, “*O my lord, by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength.*”

Then there came again and touched me one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me, And said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me. Then said he, Knowest thou wherefore I come unto thee? and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come. But I will shew thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth: and there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince. (v18-21)

The angelic messenger for a final time strengthened the old prophet. He reminds him that he is “*greatly beloved*” and encouraged him, “*fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong.*” There is a tendency in the very choicest of God’s saints in the midst of the greatest battles to feel like quitting. Two times he exhorts Daniel to “*be strong, yea, be strong.*” There is no need to fear or panic. God is still on the throne. This changed the heart and mind of Daniel who acknowledged the change and seeks the detail for the future, “*And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me.*”

The angel revealed that he has to go back to the warfare in the heavenlies, “*and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come.*” The battle with the forces of hell is not a one off event. The battle has raged for 6,000 years and will

rage until God deals with it all at the end of the Millennium once and for all. This particular battle will rage for at least another further 200 years until Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire in 331 BC. The angel also reveals that Michael alone is standing with him in this spiritual battle. Together they will overcome the forces of darkness. One of the reasons this was likely revealed to Daniel was to explain the reasons why the Empires were so long in changing from one form to another. The evil forces behind the Persian Empire were not yet defeated. Rather than panic over this great conflict, the angel simply directs Daniel to the promises of God's Holy Word, "*But I will shew thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth.*" The forces of evil are real, powerful, and organised but they can never overcome the will of God.

We cannot see these forces with our eyes. But this incident is a powerful reminder that just because we are not able to physically see this spiritual conflict in the heavenlies doesn't mean that it is not happening. God is saying to us today, "*fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong.*" The devil will attempt to disrupt and destroy the work of God. The Bible makes that plain. But he can never defeat the work of God. That is equally plain. It was the Head of the Church who assured His disciples, "*I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*" (Matt. 16:18b)

**Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.**

**Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.**