

## Grappling with the Darkness

Daniel 10:12-21

During the recent Conservative Political Action Conference in Florida one panel examined “the American Left’s efforts to dismantle the nuclear family”<sup>i</sup>. One of the panelists “called the Equality Act the ‘Sodom and Gomorrah Declaration,’ slamming the push to allow children to pick their gender, as 70% of babies in the African American community are born out-of-wedlock and many are ‘broken and lost and don’t know how to find their way anyway.’ He contended that the country is facing a ‘spiritual battle’ where children without guidance are being told ‘that they can pick their gender, boys can be girls and girls can be boys.’ ‘We’re influencing women not to need men and we’re influencing our boys to be soft,’ Brewer remarked as the crowd erupted into applause. ‘Christ Jesus was not a soft man. Are we going to establish our truth through the Word of God? Or are we going to establish through the desires of man?’ he asked.”<sup>ii</sup>

About the struggles of our divided nation, Abraham Lincoln once wrote to an acquaintance, “Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God’s side, for God is always right.”<sup>iii</sup>

This last week, Rep. W. Gregory Steube, a Republican from Florida made the following statement on the floor of the U.S. House: “Whenever a nation’s laws no longer reflect the standards of God that nation is in rebellion against Him and will inevitably bear the consequences”<sup>iv</sup> Would you agree with this sentence? Many of you here could cite Biblical references to support this statement.

But then consider the response of Rep. Gerald Nadler. “Mr. Steube, what any religious tradition ascribes as God’s will is no concern of this Congress.”<sup>v</sup> In essence Rep. Nadler argued that no discussion of God or His Word has any bearing on this dangerous legislation. Those who hold his position argue that morality is not based on theism of any kind. But what they refuse to see is that atheism or humanism dictate their view of theology – their “religious tradition.” In strong contrast to Mr. Nadler, George Washington, the first president of the United States wrote,

“I now make it my earnest prayer, that God would have you, and the State over which you preside, in his holy protection, that he would incline the hearts of the Citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to Government, to entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another, for their fellow Citizens of the United States at large, and particularly for their brethren who have served in the Field, and finally, that he would most graciously be pleased to dispose us all, to do Justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that Charity, humility and pacific temper of mind, which were the Characteristicks [sic] of the Divine Author of our blessed Religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy Nation.” But yet Mr. Nadler maintains that “God’s will is no concern of this Congress.”<sup>vi</sup>

It is not at all clear whether Lincoln and Washington were Christians. But it is evident that they had a deep respect for God. God has worked in and through kings who were unbelievers (such as Cyrus in Ezra 1:1-2). But at times God has removed His hand of protection from nations that dishonor Him (Isaiah 22:8-14). So Rep. Nadler’s foolish comment should give us pause, and cause us to pray for our nation. In many of our Sunday school classes today, we will be discussing the priesthood of the believer. There has never been a more important time to understand this privilege and exercise this priesthood.

What does this have to do with today's text of Scripture in Daniel 10? Have you ever wondered what is really behind these headlines? Are there forces at work that are leading us to "rebellion against Him?" And do we face "inevitable consequences?" In the book of Daniel, the prophet earnestly sought the Lord for his own nation, Israel. He prayed! And as the Lord gave him understanding, Daniel recorded what the Lord had taught him. Today's text includes the elements that we might include in a discussion of "Spiritual Warfare 101." For some, this will be a review. For those who have come to know the Lord more recently, this is an essential discussion. In this text, Daniel 10:12-21, we can see 6 crucial perspectives on spiritual conflict.

### 6 Crucial Perspectives on Spiritual Conflict

**"...the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me" (v. 13), "Now I have come to make you understand" (v.14), "...now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia:" (v.20)**

These are the words of the angel who spoke to Daniel about his nation, Israel. What can we learn from these statements?

#### **1. Angels of God and saints of God are presently in spiritual conflict with the powers of darkness. 10:13-14, 20-21**

In the last message,<sup>vii</sup> Pastor Rodney King explained our understanding of the identity of "the Prince of Persia" and of Michael. We understand that these verses describe angels and demons in conflict. Christian believers and angels wrestle against "**principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places**" (Ephesians 6:12). We do so in confident victory, knowing what Jesus Christ accomplished in His death, burial and resurrection. As John wrote about the believers' triumph (over the spirit of antichrist), "**You are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than He that is in the world**" (1 John 4:4). So even now, saints and angels are in spiritual conflict with the power of darkness. But take heart. When your adversary, the Devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, you can be sober and vigilant (1 Peter 5:8); you can resist him and he will flee from you (James 4:7).

An angel had been sent to give Daniel a message, but the angel was resisted by the prince of Persia for twenty-one (21) days (v.13). With the help of another angel, Michael, he delivered the message to Daniel in answer to Daniel's prayers.

Now note the references to nations in this text: "**the prince of the kingdom of Persia**" (v. 13), "**thy people [Israel] in the latter days**" (v. 14), "**prince of Persia,**" "**the prince of Greece**" (v. 20). What do these verses tell us?

#### **2. This present spiritual conflict has direct connections to geo-political events. 10:13, 14, 20**

Like Daniel chapters 2, 7, and 8, this prophecy described nations such as Persia, Greece and Israel. From Daniel 10 we learn that there were spiritual forces at work in those conflicts. G.H. Lang wrote, "Satan's dear delight being the ruin of man, it served well his interests that these unseen princes should incite and assist nations to destroy one another."<sup>viii</sup> In verse 20, Michael foretold his ongoing battle with the prince of Persia and the arrival of the prince of Greece. As one author noted, "Parenthetically the angel announced that soon he must "return to fight against the prince of Persia," a battle that would continue for two centuries of Persian rule (539–331 B.C.). This struggle involved all of the decisions and

relationships pertaining to the Jews during the Persian period (e.g., the reconstruction of the temple, deliverance for the Jews during the time of Esther, permission for Ezra and Nehemiah to return, and their subsequent construction of the city).<sup>ix</sup> As you know, it was during this period (at the end of the Exile) that the focus was on the Promised Land. But the most important part of the Promised Land was that it was part of the prophecy of the Promised Lord, the Messiah of Isaiah 53. So Satan and his minions fought to derail the prophecies about the coming of Christ. But make no mistake, after the coming of Christ, these demon forces are still at work. This time the issue is the Second Coming of Christ. Revelation describes a spiritual conflict during the coming Tribulation: **“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.”** (Revelation 12:7-8)

In the midst of this spiritual warfare, we find Daniel worshiping the Lord. In fact, as he worshiped the Lord, he began to understand the warfare. Daniel learned that prevailing prayer was the most potent weapon he could employ. The prophet prayed for Israel, but you could pray for your country<sup>x</sup> in the same way. When you read of politicians saying that God’s will has no bearing on our Congress, it’s time for congregations to recognize that this is a spiritual warfare. It’s time to pray!

The angel described his mission in verse 14: **“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.”** The angel’s message was about Israel in the end times. According to the Scriptures, we are now living in the last days (2 Timothy 3:1, Hebrews 1:2). So the events described in chapters 10-12 of Daniel extend into our own day. They were not completely fulfilled during Daniel’s day, nor even when the New Testament was written. These prophecies about Israel are still in effect. In fact, the events of the Tribulation are designed to bring Israel back to faith in the one true God. During the Tribulation, they will embrace their one true Messiah.

What can we learn from this to help us in these spiritual conflicts?

### **3. God has ordained concise communications to His servants to tell them all they need to know about this spiritual conflict. 10:14-17**

There are those who say that it is impossible for God to speak to man. Or, at least, they say, it is impossible for finite man to understand infinite God. Yet this episode in the life of Daniel shows you that both of those statements are false. The infinite God does speak to man, and finite man understands Him. Though Daniel expressed astonishment as to how he could receive and understand this revelation (v. 17), he did understand. The angelic messenger had been sent to help Daniel understand. And this message about spiritual warfare stunned him. As you and I try to grapple with the darkness we need the light of God’s Word. One of those great lights is 2 Peter 1:3, **“According as His divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us to glory and virtue.”** Rejoice! You have everything you need to do God’s will! Consider the power of the One who called you to glory and virtue.

The Lord’s concise communications help us to grapple with the darkness. In the context of spiritual warfare, Jesus Christ commanded His followers to be servants (Luke 22:24-32). Yes, Satan desired to sift the apostles like wheat, but Christ prayed for them (just as He is interceding for us). Jesus acknowledged that the power of darkness is very real: **“When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness”** (Luke 22:53). What can we say to

each other when the power of darkness seems to prevail? Listen to the way that Jesus Christ diagrammed spiritual warfare in Luke 11:21-22, **“When a strong man armed keeps his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he takes from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divides his spoils.”** Satan is the strong man who is armed and keeping his palace. But the stronger man [Jesus Christ!] comes upon him, overcomes him, takes away his weapons and divides Satan’s spoils – the souls of men. As we grapple with the darkness today, we do so in the power of the Stronger Man, Jesus Christ. But grappling with the darkness is no easy task.

**4. These universal spiritual conflicts have direct connections to the struggles in you, as a believer. 10:12, 15-16**

Aging Daniel humbled his heart to enter into the struggle. He prayed in order that he might turn from his iniquities and understand God’s truth (Daniel 9:13). And his understanding of the glory of God humbled him yet the more. But Daniel learned to grapple with the darkness by diligently pursuing God.

■ By humble, prayerful pursuit, 10:12

The angel’s message to Daniel is still for us today: **“Do not be afraid.”** The Apostle Paul commanded Timothy: **“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”** (2 Timothy 1:7). It is true that believers are to fear God (Colossians 3:22), but this is the deep reverence that causes one to do what is pleasing to God. This is not a fear that drives the believer away; it fills him with renewed desire. But how could such awesome revelation from God affect anyone in this way? (For instance, in verse 17, Daniel himself asked, **“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.”** Part of the answer is in verse 12: Daniel had set himself to understand by humbling (chastening) his heart before the Lord. He understood Proverbs 3:34, **“Surely [the Lord] scorns the scorers: but He gives grace to the lowly.”** (Quoted in the New Testament: **“God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.”** (James 4:5, 1 Peter 5:5). God gave grace to humbled Daniel. And the angel testified him, **“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 have come for [because of] your words.”** (v. 12).

■ By humbled response to the immensity of God’s vision, 10:15-16

As Daniel had prayed about the future of his nation, God helped him to understand. He began to understand the dark forces that were at work. He began to grapple with the darkness. Through the concise communication of God’s Word to us today, we can learn to grapple with the darkness. Consider the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, **“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal [physical/fleshly], but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;”**

**5. God sends His angels to strengthen and encourage His saints in this spiritual conflict. 10:18-20**

Hebrews 1:14 describes the relationship of God’s angels to each believer: **“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”** When we get to heaven, we

will marvel at all of the ways that God's angels protected us and helped us. If the angels could speak to us today, they would undoubtedly encourage us the way the angel encouraged Daniel in verse 19:

**“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.”**

- You are greatly beloved! Even today, Christians are greatly beloved because they are accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6)
- Do not be afraid! “Peace be to you” (you are safe): “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing...” (Romans 15:13)
- “Be strong, yes be strong!” “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Ephesians 6:10)

As we grapple with the darkness, it be helpful for us to remember a promise given to God's people through Moses and Joshua (Deuteronomy 11:24, Joshua 1:3). **“I will give you every place where you set your foot ...”** When you think about the history of God's people in the Book of Joshua, this raises a question: “Why didn't they go forward and take every inch of the land?” If God promised that He would give them every place where they placed their feet,” why didn't they place their feet? Why didn't they trust the God who had promised to fight their battles for them? And to turn the question around, “Why don't we trust the God who has given us His promises as we grapple with the darkness?” We have the promise, **“Now thanks be unto God, which always causes us to triumph in Christ ...”** (2 Corinthians 2:14). Will you trust God's promises of victory as you grapple with the darkness? The outcome is already certain!

#### **6. The Sovereign God has already determined the course of this spiritual conflict and He reigns supreme in every part of it. 10:21**

Verse 21 of Daniel 10 provides a transition to the last two chapters of Daniel. The angel told Daniel what was already written in the Book of Truth – God's plan for Israel and the world. In other words, the Lord had already foreordained the outcome. Yes, the angel would have to fight in the spiritual conflict. But God had already determined the course and the outcome of this spiritual conflict. And He reigns supreme in every part of it. All of these things remind us of the central theme of the Book of Daniel: **“to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men”** (Daniel 4:17)

Dear friends, our Sovereign Lord has won the victory. Take no counsel of your fears but begin with this simple truth: God is able.

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Questions for our discussion groups today

- a. How should we respond when the leaders of our nation say such things as “what any religious tradition ascribes as God's will is no concern of this Congress.”?

- b. What indications do you see that indicate that there is a spiritual warfare raging all around us?
- c. Which verses or passages give you confidence as you grapple with the darkness in spiritual conflict?
- d. According to Daniel 10, what did Daniel do that led to his understanding the gravity of the spiritual warfare raging around him?
- e. Which promises of God do you personally use when you face your fears?

<sup>i</sup> Ryan Foley, "Burgess Owens at CPAC: 'When you take God out of the equation, destruction is what's left'" The Christian Post, February 27, 2021, accessed at <https://www.christianpost.com/news/burgess-owens-at-cpac-when-you-remove-god-destruction-is-whats-left.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> This quote is commonly reported by several sources. See The Washington Flyer, AACCS accessed at <http://www.aacs.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/WF012011crh-rev2.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> "Rep. Jerry Nadler says, "God's will, is no concern of this Congress on The Equality Act" Accessed at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkJMLX\\_wk-U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkJMLX_wk-U) February 26, 2021 These speeches were part of the debate concerning the poorly named "Equality Act" recently passed by the U.S. House. For a discussion of this issue, see Christopher Bedford, "Blessings Of Liberty': How 'The Equality Act' Viciously Attacks Christians, Freedom, Society, Sex, And You" The Federalist, February 25, 2021 accessed at <https://thefederalist.com/2021/02/25/blessings-of-liberty-how-the-equality-act-viciously-attacks-christians-freedom-society-sex-and-you/>

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vi</sup> George Washington, Circular to the States, June 8, 1783, accessed at <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/quotes/article/i-now-make-it-my-earnest-prayer-that-god-would-have-you-and-the-state-over-which-you-preside-in-his-holy-protection-that-he-would-incline-the-hearts-of-the-citizens-to-cultivate-a-spirit-of-subordination-and-obedience-to-government-to-entertain-a-brother/>

<sup>vii</sup> Prayer and the Heavenly Realm accessed at <https://www.cbfindlay.org/wp-admin/upload.php?item=14688> Audio of this message is available at

<sup>viii</sup> G.H. Lang, The Histories and Prophecies of Daniel, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1940, p.147. Within a decade of this writing, even greater atrocities would have been public knowledge.

<sup>ix</sup> Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 288.

<sup>x</sup> What You Can Do for Your Country accessed at <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=791020581110>