

## **“Making Sense of the Struggle”**

Daniel 10:1-21

Let's take our Bible and make our way once more to the tenth chapter of Daniel. We have been in this chapter for some time now, and I must admit that I have been gripped by the truth to be discovered in these verses. I would be safe in saying that all of us realize we are living in a time where conflict seems to have escalated. Have you ever wrestled over the subject of conflict in our world and wondered where it all is coming from? Nearly everyone recognizes that something is wrong in the world, and many are looking for someone to blame. There is no shortage of answers when it comes to offering some kind of an explanation for the vitriol of our times. Keep in mind how Jesus said that in the last days:

**Matthew 24:10-12—“...many will fall away, and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.”**

If you truly want to make sense of the struggle, then you will be encouraged by what you find out about it all in this tenth chapter of Daniel. It is a passage that begins the final and longest prophetic vision of the book, beginning with a vision in chapter 10 and ending with a prophecy that takes us through chapters 11-12. As chapter 10 begins, we read that Daniel has been made aware of a great conflict in his day. However, he soon discovers that what was happening on the ground was tied to what was happening in the air. Conflict that manifested itself visibly was ultimately being manipulated invisibly. Daniel's eyes are opened up in this passage to see what is typically unseen. The curtain that separates the material world from the spiritual world is momentarily pulled back, and the

resulting vision shows us how things which are seen are influenced by things which are unseen. This passage shows us how conflicts on earth reflect conflicts in the heavens, and it will continue this way until the time of the end, when Christ will ultimately triumph over all and sets up an everlasting kingdom. (Read)

Daniel is made aware of a great conflict that involves God's people, and the source behind this conflict involves an evil spiritual entity. Throughout the history of the world, those who love and worship the God of the Bible and in particular have faith in His Son have been subjected to some of the most extreme persecution. Why?

**Abraham Kuyper** — *“There is not one square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’”*

The lordship of Jesus Christ is something that is opposed by the world, the flesh, and the devil. In our fallen world, there are unseen forces at work who oppose the kingdom of God and seek to keep humanity shackled. There is a conflict that exists between kingdoms. This conflict is announced at the beginning of the Bible in Genesis 3:15 and will reach its climax at the cross where Jesus Christ openly triumphs over powers by means of His death and resurrection. Having robbed the grave of its power, and having defeated Satan on his own turf, the keys to the kingdom are now given to His church which is engaged in a search and rescue mission. We face resistance from the enemy's holdouts, and will continue to do so until the King returns and His kingdom is ushered in its fullness. In fact, the conflict will only grow stronger and more intense as we get closer to the day of Christ's coming. (Rev. 12:1-17)

If we are to make sense of the struggle, we must realize:

## 1—The importance of PRAYER (10:1-9)

*“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. 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.”*

### How Daniel had served

Daniel is still serving God after all these years in Babylon. Verse 1 says that it was during the third year of King Cyrus that a word was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar. It was the name the Babylonians had given to Daniel many decades earlier when he was a young man. By this point, he is now a man in his mid to late 80's who has seen a lot of transition in the kingdom. Yet despite of it all, there is something to be said about the consistency of Daniel's character. He is a case study in faithfulness and consistency. Kings have come and gone, empires have risen and fallen, and he is still serving God all these years later, even in the third year of King Cyrus. Cyrus was the Persian king who led the Medo-Persian empire that overthrew the Babylonians. One of his first official acts was to allow the Jewish captives to return to their native land. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God had promised that after 70 years of captivity, He would bring His people back home. It was Cyrus who became an instrument in God's hands to begin that process. The first chapter of Ezra provides the background:

**Ezra 1:1-3—“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, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: Thus says Cyrus king of Persia:**

**The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem.”**

Daniel watched all of that with joy in his heart as caravans of Jews began the long journey back home. After those long years of captivity, the time had come for God’s people to make their way back home. That was in the first year of Cyrus’ reign. Here in verse 1, a full two years had gone by as Daniel is now in the third year of Cyrus. We’re told that a word was revealed to Daniel, the word was true, and it involved a great conflict. He had been given a revelation, the revelation was true, and he understood what it meant. The next two chapters will show that it involved a coming future conflict for God’s people who were back in the land.

In verses 2, Daniel speaks in the first person and says that during those days he had been mourning for three weeks. He had been fasting and praying. He didn’t anoint himself. He is greatly burdened over something. God’s people had been allowed to return home, which was the very thing he had prayed for earlier in chapter 9. While many made the trip, Ezra says that only 42,000 did so compared to the several hundred thousand that had been carried off into captivity. In other words, only a fraction of the people had made it back home by the third year of Cyrus. Those who did return were under distress and there was opposition to rebuilding which suspended their efforts. After two years, the foundation of the temple was barely laid and the work came to a grinding halt. The opposition, on top of the difficulties of making a living, caused the exiles who had returned to stop the work and it would stay that way for 15 years. So the

third year of Cyrus would have been a time of discouragement for God's people. The thrill and emotion that surrounded their initial return had faded and the great challenge of rebuilding had set in. It was no easy road.

This is what burdened Daniel's heart. He is in mourning for three weeks, praying and fasting over the situation. It was not an attempt to impress God with his own piety. Neither was he trying to impress other people. Rather, it was his way of removing distractions so that he could pray and focus his mind and heart entirely on God.

**Matthew 7:7—“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”**

**Dee Duke**—*“Almost everyone believes that prayer is important. But there is a difference between believing that prayer is important and believing it is essential. ‘Essential’ means there are things that will not happen without prayer.”*

Daniel's life is an illustration of someone who recognized the essential nature of prayer amid the conflicts of life. I imagine that there is not a person listening to me this morning who does not recognize the importance of prayer. All of us agree that prayer is important. However, for the vast majority of you, it is not essential. That's why there is so very little commitment to it in your life. It may very well explain why you are frustrated, empty, and so irritable. If you want to begin to make sense of the struggles of life, it means prayer must become essential to you. And not just in the personal, private sense. Prayer must be essential in the corporate, gathered sense. When the church in Acts experienced conflict, they prayed.

Who Daniel had seen

After three weeks of praying and fasting, verse 4 says that Daniel was standing on the bank of the Tigris River and sees a most awesome sight. Daniel sees what can only be described as a man with a radiant appearance. The man is described in vivid terms. He says in verse 5, “I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, 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.” It was a powerful encounter unlike anything that Daniel had witnessed before. And that is saying a lot, because he had been the recipient of previous visions and had seen angels before. I don’t believe this was merely an angel, however. I believe this is ‘the angel of the Lord’ who shows up in a variety of ways throughout the Old Testament, a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son of Man. The description Daniel gives of this Man in linen is nearly parallel to an encounter that the apostle John has later:

**Revelation 1:12-16—“Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.”**

Both men were praying when these visions were given, and as they prayed, the veil that separated the visible from the invisible was temporarily removed. When

it was, both Daniel and John were able to see the One they had been speaking to in prayer.

**Ray Stedman**—*“That Person didn’t suddenly appear out of nowhere. He had been there all the time, but He had been invisible. Through prayer, the veil that cloaked Him from Daniel’s eyes was pierced. Daniel’s eyes were opened. He saw the invisible world of spiritual beings all around him—and suddenly he beheld the One whose eyes were like flaming torches and whose face shone like the sun in its strength.”*

In verse 7, Daniel says, “I 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.” They knew something was going on, and that there was a sense of divine presence, but it made the hair stand up on the back of their necks so that they fled. He says in verse 8 that he was left alone, no strength was left in him, and his appearance was fearfully changed. Literally, it means that he was brought to ruin. It is the same reaction of anyone else in the Bible who has an encounter with the manifested presence of God.

He says in verse 9, “Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground.” Listen, let me tell you something—there is no ‘flippancy’ in the presence of God. When God’s manifested presence shows up in power like this, there isn’t a shred of human pride left behind in its wake. When we see the glorified Christ for who He truly is, we will see ourselves in true light and recognize our sin and need. I find it interesting that Daniel has this experience toward the end of a long and faithful life. He is a man of prayer who has walked with God for many years. And yet there is a tenderness and a sensitivity in his life toward spiritual things.

Often, the older we get, the more set in our ways we become. And we can even become calloused and lackluster in our relationship with God.

**Matthew 5:8—“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”**

I think that’s what is happening in Daniel’s life. This man who has walked with God throughout his days in Babylon, he is now able to see what others can’t see, able to hear what others can’t hear, and able to stand when everyone else has run away. The Lord is going to give him one final vision of the future as it relates to His people, and it all begins with Daniel being given a glimpse of God Himself in all of His glory.

## **2—The source of CONFLICT (10:10-15)**

*“And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. And he said to me, ‘O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you.’ And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, ‘Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words.’”*

In verse 10, Daniel says that a hand touched him and set him trembling on his hands and knees. But immediately, he is given reassurance that he is greatly loved and that the heavenly messenger has been sent to him on account of his words. His prayer life moved heaven and earth. It reminds me of a prayer meeting recorded in Acts 12 where the church was praying for Peter’s release. And as earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church, an angel of God was sent into the prison house that night.

**Thomas Watson** — *“The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer that fetched the angel.”*

There are a lot of Bible scholars who see a different person speaking to Daniel in verse 11 rather than the Man in linen identified as the Son of God. In fact, toward the end of the vision in chapter 12, we learn that there are two others with the Man in linen. These are angels who communicate with Daniel, and he learns of an angelic conflict that had been going on in the unseen heavenly places.

Daniel’s prayer had been heard the very moment that he began to pray, but the answer is three weeks in getting to him. Why? The answer lies in the fact that there was an unseen conflict being waged. Notice what the angel says in verse 13:

*“The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, and I came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come.”*

It is obvious that this angelic messenger is not speaking of human opposition. The ‘prince’ of Persia speaks of the hostile spirit behind the kingdom of Persia. It provides us a glimpse into the existence of spiritual principalities behind the fallen kingdoms of sinful man. It is a reference to the angelic power behind these earthly kingdoms. There are evil forces at work behind earthly thrones. (see Matt. 4)

**Isaiah 24:21** — **“On that day the Lord will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth.”**

What we find in these verses is an often overlooked and downplayed truth, men and women. There is a spiritual organization behind the powers that be. The

conflict that rages against God and His people originates in an unseen heavenly realm. It is not ultimately political, yet within the governments of this world, behind the powers that be, are dark and evil forces at work.

**Abraham Kuyper** — *“If once the curtain were pulled back, and the spiritual world behind it came into view, it would expose to our spiritual vision a struggle so intense, so convulsive, sweeping everything within its range, that the fiercest battle fought on earth would seem by comparison a mere game. Not here, but up there—that is where the real conflict is engaged.”*

In the unseen realm there rages a battle, and that battle influences the events of our world. The modern mind may scoff at that notion and ridicule it, but from cover to cover, God’s Word declares it to be so. It is something that you and I must understand. You will not understand life if you fail to grasp this truth, if you go through life solely relying on your five senses, with no spiritual understanding. Satan wants to keep us blinded to this ultimate reality.

**Harold Wilmington** — *“If I were the devil I would deny my existence in the world and downplay it to the local church, thus freeing me to go about my business unheeded, unhindered, and unchecked.”*

In a postmodern age, the devil has been working overtime to promote this non-belief when it comes to his existence. If there is no personal enemy, there will be no preparation for defense against that personal enemy. And if there is no preparation for defense, the enemy can attack at will and work his evil all while remaining ‘incognito.’

Daniel 10 makes it clear that holy and unholy angels exist, they engage one another in conflict, and your prayer life in some way affects the battle. The Christian life involves a spiritual warfare that cannot be avoided. The material,

visible realm is greatly affected by the spiritual, invisible realm that the Bible refers to as 'heavenly places.' Daniel is being told here about a conflict that happened in those heavenly places. It gives a glimpse into what Paul writes:

**Ephesians 6:10-12—“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you might be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”**

If for one second your physical eyes were to be opened to the spiritual forces that do battle against your soul, it would strike terror in your heart. It would forever change the way that you live your life and approach spiritual things. You would take prayer much more seriously than you do now. You would be more sensitive to the truth of Scripture. You would not be so quick to judge your circumstances. In a sense, this is what Paul does in Ephesians 6. He opens up our spiritual eyes and wants us to be alert to the presence of an unseen enemy. He says that life is so serious that it demands we be 'armored' up.

**Donald Grey Barnhouse—***“Many things in history will become clearer to the student of the Bible who is also a student of history when it is realized that behind every earthly power there is a satanic power lurking, seeking to control and dominate for the glory of the rebel who declared war against God.”*

While it is true that Romans 13 says that the powers that be are ordained by God, in no way does that mean their agenda lines up with His. But it does mean He is ultimately in control and will accomplish His purposes. Though hell may oppose us, God's truth marches on still. Daniel learns that there were some

things happening in the heavenly realms that he was unaware of. His prayers were affecting things in a much greater way than he could have imagined.

### **3—The need for STRENGTH (10:16-21)**

*“And behold, one in the likeness of the children of man touched my lips. Then I opened my mouth and spoke. I said to him who stood before me, ‘O my lord, by reason of the vision pains have come upon me, and I retain no strength. How can my lord’s servant talk with my lord? For now no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me.’ Again one having the appearance of a man touched me and strengthened me. And he said, ‘O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage.’ And as he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, ‘Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.’”*

At least three times in these verses are we told that Daniel was without strength, and it was by supernatural means he was strengthened. Daniel needed strength for the battle. His sufficiency was not in himself, but in God. Again, the words of the Paul are helpful—“Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” The grammar of that text is in the present imperative. He is basically saying, “Be continually being strengthened in the Lord.” Yes, our enemy is strong and formidable. We dare not face him in our own strength, but he is certainly no match for the power of God. And God has given us all we need to face the heat of conflict. That is what Paul wants us to understand in Ephesians 6. From Daniel’s own example, we learn some valuable truths:

- When we pray in faith, God hears us immediately
- Demonic forces can delay answers, but we are not alone in our conflict
- Following times of intense prayer, strength returns in extra measure

- When we experience victory, we must be careful to not let our guard down

It has been my experience in life that the enemy doesn't really retreat—he simply regroups. He will bide his time and look for an opportune season to attack.

That's why we must watch and pray. We must be sober-minded as we go about life. Like the servant of Elisha in 2 Kings 6, our eyes must be opened up to spiritual realities.

Once it dawns on you that we are literally surrounded by an invisible world of spiritual conflict, it will forever change the way you see life. It will change the way you react to your problems. Yes, this present world lies in the power of the evil one. He is the prince of this fallen world system, he is the power behind the cankered and corroded thrones of sinful man. But greater is He who is in you than he that is in the world, and we must learn to see things through the eyes of faith. And lest we become discouraged, we cannot possibly begin to imagine the 'unseen help' that has come our way through the difficult seasons of life.

**Hebrews 1:14—“Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?”**

Do you believe in the existence of what some have called 'guardian' angels?

Jesus said:

**Matthew 18:10—“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.”**

Who knows how many times we've received the assistance of angels in our lives and didn't even know it?

**Hebrews 13:2—“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”**

Only the Lord God knows how many times an angel has been dispatched to you at a time you needed strength, at a time you were at your lowest point, at a time when you were about to throw in the towel. Daniel is strengthened by such a one, and he will go on to receive one final prophetic vision of the future.

**Psalm 34:7—“The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.”**

Last weekend, Anita and I stole away for a few days just by ourselves. We went on a roadtrip up through Pennsylvania and parts of upstate New York. On the way, we spent an afternoon at Gettysburg National Battlefield. I stood there on Little Round Top, which was the strategic high ground that was held by the Union army. After three days of combat and more than 50,000 casualties, the Confederates were defeated and it became the decisive moment that led to the perseverance of the Union. Well, just a couple years before that, there was a doctor and his wife who made a visit to the camp of the Union army that was just outside of Washington, DC. The doctor was Samuel Howe, and his wife was Julia Howe. She happened to overhear a group of soldiers singing a tune that stuck in her mind. She felt the tune needed some better lyrics. So the next morning, she got up extra early, and said to herself, “I’ll lose this if I don’t write it down immediately.” Here’s what she wrote:

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;  
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword,  
His truth is marching on.*

*I have seen Him in the watchfire of a hundred circling camps;*

*They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;  
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps,  
His day is marching on.*

*I have read His fiery gospel writ in rows of burnished steel;  
As ye deal with My condemners, so with you My grace shall deal;  
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with His heel,  
Since God is marching on.*

*He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;  
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat;  
O, be swift, my soul, to answer Him, be jubilant my feet,  
Our God is marching on.*

*In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,  
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me;  
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,  
While God is marching on.*

We occupy the high ground, church. The battle has been won, and the field has already been taken. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has disarmed rulers and authorities and put them to open shame. There is hope for the fallen members of Adam's race who place their faith and trust in Christ. And it won't be long until the King returns and His flag will fly high above all castles, thrones, and dominions.

**2 Corinthians 2:14—“...thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ.”**