

Real Spiritual Warfare

An article from the April 1990 issue of *Charisma and the Christian Life*, recounts the experience of a pastor, Steve Nicholson from a town in Illinois. It says, 'Steve Nicholson has preached the gospel in the area for six years, with virtually no fruit... Nicholson begins some serious prayer and fasting. A grotesque, unnatural being appears to him. It growls, "Why are you bothering me?" It identifies itself as a demon of witchcraft who has dominion over the geographical area. In the heat of warfare, Nicholson names the city streets in the surrounding area. The spirit retorts, "I don't want to give you that much." In the name of Jesus, Nicholson commands the spirit to give up the territory. During the next three months the church doubles in size from 70 to 150, mostly from new converts out of witchcraft. Nearly all of the new believers must be delivered from demons (Steven Lawson, "Defeating Territorial Spirits" [April 1990]:48), quoted in *How to Meet the Enemy*, John MacArthur.

Many Christians are convinced that this kind of thing is supposed to be part of normal Christian life and normal church life. Many are convinced that the keys to spiritual growth lie in finding out which demons own certain towns and cities, and taking them on in personal confrontations, known as power-encounters.

Many people live with the fear that demons and spiritual forces are continually gaining ground in their lives, and that they must take on these demons in a kind of one-on-one combat. They fear that they have not prayed enough in Jesus' name, not bound Satan, not taken ownership of something in Jesus' name, and that this explains their bad luck or calamities or difficulties.

What is real spiritual warfare? Is it binding and rebuking Satan? Is it renouncing generational curses? Is it claiming territory in Jesus' name? Is it taking the forces of darkness on in a one-on-one wrestle? Spiritual warfare is a real part of the Christian life, but what does it really involve.

Daniel 10 has some of the answers. This is a chapter which introduces the final vision of the book of Daniel. But it sets the stage with a fascinating account of spiritual warfare that goes on behind the scenes, which we play a part in. From Daniel's responses and reactions, we can learn much about what our part in spiritual warfare really is.

I. Daniel's Power Encounter

Daniel 10:1-21 In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar. The message was true, but the appointed time was long; and he understood the message, and had understanding of the vision. 2 In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. 3 I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.

4 Now on the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, that is, the Tigris, 5 I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist was girded with gold of Uphaz! 6 His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude. 7 And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision; but a great terror fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. 8 Therefore I was left alone when I saw this great vision, and no strength remained in me; for my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength. 9 Yet I heard the sound of his words; and while I heard the sound of his words I was in a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground.

This happens some two years after his vision of the seventy weeks. He has been praying and fasting for three weeks, giving himself to seeking the Lord. He is now on some kind of business accompanied by others, and is literally by the Tigris river. He sees not in a vision, but with his own

eyes, some spiritual being. The being looks human in appearance, clothed in linen. Around his waist, he has some kind of belt or sash which is made of gold. The gold of Uphaz was some of the finest gold in the ancient near-East. His body seems to be the colour of beryl, his arms and feet like bronze. His face seemed like lightning, his eyes burned like fire, and his voice had the sound of the great roar of many people.

He is seeing some kind of heavenly being. Who or what is this Being he sees? There are at least three possibilities. Some have suggested that he is seeing what we call a theophany or a christophany. That is, Daniel is seeing a manifestation of God the Son before His incarnation as a human. We have several of these in the book of Genesis, the book of Joshua, and the book of Judges. When you compare the description of this being to the description of the risen Lord Jesus in Revelation.

Revelation 1:13 *and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. ¹⁴ His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; ¹⁵ His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters;*

I think this is possible, as long as we do not identify this vision with the angel who speaks to Daniel next. Because if we are to say that the Lord Jesus is the same person whom Daniel sees and who talks to Daniel, we are left with the very uncomfortable idea that the Lord Jesus was opposed by an evil angel and couldn't defeat him until Michael came to help. I cannot accept that.

A second possibility is that Daniel sees an angel, simply a powerful being whose appearance resembles the appearance of Christ in Revelation. Similarity does not mean the two are identical. It is this angel who speaks to him from verse 10. This is possible.

There's a third possibility, and this is what I would go with. I think the being Daniel sees here is referred to by name a little later. I think he sees Michael the Archangel. He sees a vision of the chief angel, Michael, and after this overwhelming vision, another angel speaks to him.

Now take note what effect this encounter with a heavenly being has on Daniel and his companions.

I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision; but a great terror fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves.

This sounds a lot like what happened to Saul on the road to Damascus. The men with him did not understand the voice. They saw some kind of presence and it frightened them. Or in John 12:29, where the Father spoke from heaven, and some standing by said, "It thundered". The ones around Daniel sense a power overwhelmingly superior to their own, and they flee for their lives. They sense they are in danger of death. They have sensed something like being confronted by a dinosaur four times your size; like being confronted by an attack helicopter with guns and rockets trained on you. You run for your life.

What does eighty-something-year old Daniel do? His poor body is simply sapped of its strength. He feels as if his energy was just suctioned out of him. Every muscle seems to quiver and lose strength. You may have been in a situation where the terror of seeing or facing something just seemed to pull the carpet from under your feet, knock the wind out of you, and you need to sit down before you faint. Poor Daniel doesn't get to do that: he simply faints. He is in a deep sleep, unconscious, only vaguely aware of the sound of Michael's voice.

This is the effect on Daniel of encountering a heavenly being. This is the effect of encountering a being that was unfallen, and intended no harm to Daniel. What would it be to encounter a spirit being that was filled with evil and wanted to destroy him?

When people want to encounter demons and take them on in some kind of personal confrontation, they have no idea what they are dabbling with. We actually have an account in the New Testament of people who began to dabble in these things without understanding what they were dealing with.

Acts 19:13-16 ¹³ Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." ¹⁴ Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. ¹⁵ And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" ¹⁶ Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

You do not want to take on a demon. You do not want to encounter a fallen or unfallen spirit being. You do not want, in frail human bodies that are decaying and await a resurrection and glorification, to go toe-to-toe and one-on-one with angelic beings. Here is one of the godliest men in history, and he is completely wiped out by the experience. Spiritual warfare is not about encountering a demon and entering into some kind of spiritual wrestling match with it.

If God had wanted us to take on demons, challenge them, rebuke them, bind them, surely He would have told us somewhere in Scripture to do that. However, we do not find a single New testament command which says, cast out demons, interrogate them, interview them. God loves us and wants to protect us. He shields us from encountering fallen spirit beings.

So what part do we play? What is our role in spiritual warfare?

II. Daniel's Part in Spiritual Warfare

10 Suddenly, a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and on the palms of my hands. 11 And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling. 12 Then he said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. 13 "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia. 14 "Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come."

Here a being touches Daniel and gets him off his face, and onto his hands and knees, still shaking. He encourages Daniel some more, telling him that he is greatly loved and God has sent him to give Daniel a message. By now Daniel is standing, and still shaking like a leaf. Daniel is not singing, binding and rebuking everything in creation, taking dominion, doing a prayer-walk, renouncing generational curses. After seeing Michael, he's just trying to stand up without collapsing.

When the angel is sure that Daniel is steady enough to listen, he gives him very encouraging news. His prayers before God for Israel have been heard. This angel was dispatched because of Daniel's words.

In fact, he was dispatched the moment Daniel began praying. When had Daniel begun praying?

2 In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. 3 I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.

Daniel had been praying and fasting for three weeks. This angel tells him that for those three weeks, for 21 days, he had been withstood by another heavenly being. Apparently, a demonic spiritual being, somehow associated with Persia, fought with this angel to prevent him from coming to Daniel and giving the prophecy. It seems it was in Satan's interest for these prophecies to not be written, and not see the light of day. So this demonic being fought with this angel and was apparently stronger than he. What tipped the balance was when Michael arrived.

Michael is apparently one of the chief princes, the highest of angels, if not the highest angel. And while this demonic being was called the prince of Persia, Michael is called the prince of Israel. He fights on behalf of Israel.

Does this teach that there are territorial demons, demons connected with particular places? I don't think so. I think what we have here is simply the truth that the god of this world, Satan, organises his kingdom. He has princes and rulers who administrate his kingdom, and particularly the world powers. Remember in Daniel the key world empires are Babylon, Persian, Greece and Rome.

Now the passage raises all kinds of questions which it doesn't try to answer. What kind of combat takes place between God's angels and Satan's? Why did a demon seem to prevail over one of God's? Why did God let that happen? How often does this take place? And what sort of answer does Daniel give to those questions? He doesn't. He doesn't even try. And so before we start concocting theories about spiritual warfare, let's remember that God only briefly lifted the curtain on what goes on in the heavenly realm. He wanted us to know there is a battle, but not much more than that.

What is Daniel explicitly told? *He is told that his prayers have been answered.* He is told that his words to God have brought this angel. The only reason why the angel even mentions his combat is to explain why he is late, why he has been delayed, why he didn't arrive the first day of Daniel's fast. What Daniel is to know is that his prayers make a difference. You think your prayers make no difference. Prayer mobilises beings more powerful than we can possibly imagine. God has chosen to place huge tools into the hands of his children.

Spiritual warfare is not taking on the forces of darkness in personal encounters. It is dealing directly with God in prayer and obedience. What makes spiritual warfare *spiritual* is not the nature of our enemies. It's not spiritual warfare because we're supposed to fight these spirits. It's spiritual warfare because of the nature of our weapons. The weapons we use are spiritual in nature. When we use them, God presses and maintains His victory over Satan.

Let me show you three areas to focus on which will make sure your spiritual weapons will be enlisted in God's battle.

1) Focus on a life of godly devotion

James 4:7-10 ⁷ *Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.* ⁸ *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.* ⁹ *Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.* ¹⁰ *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.*

Notice when the devil flees from us. It is when our lives resembles these verses. When we are submitted to God, a life of submission an obedience; when we are seeking God, a life of drawing near to God and loving Him; when we are shunning sin, a life of repentance and confession. This is the life which resists the devil.

A sheep that wanders from the shepherd is no match for a wolf, no matter what it bleats. But a sheep close to the Shepherd's side – that sheep will cause the wolf to flee, because the wolf fears the shepherd. A life of godly devotion is a life lived close to the Shepherd, Jesus Christ. He is the one that Satan and the demons fear, and so He is the one we cleave to.

2) Focus on a life of godly character

Ephesians 6:10-18 ¹⁰ Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸ praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints --

When you look at that armour, what strikes you is that each piece is the characteristic it refers to. The shield is faith; the breastplate is righteousness; the sword is the Word. The idea is, when you cultivate righteousness in your life, that is your breastplate. When you grow and exercise faith, that is your shield. When you love and learn the truth, that is your belt. When you know and obey the Word, that is your sword. The Bible is saying that you are to focus on Christian character, not on warfare techniques. The righteous, faith-filled, truth-loving Christian is protected. The Word-saturated believer has a sword which slashes at Satan's kingdom every time he learns it, obeys it and teaches it.

Notice the large place which is given to prayer, verifying Daniel's experience.

Spiritual warfare is all about character.

3) Focus on a life of godly thinking

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 ³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

Notice what Paul says are the weapons of our warfare: sound reasons, right thinking, truth which casts down arguments and objections to God. Thinking that is made obedient to Christ.

The battle for souls is a battle with ideas, not with swords or guns. People are won with truth, with the ideas of Scripture shown and proved and taught. When Christians think well, when they know what they believe, and why they believe it, they are powerful soldiers in God's army. On the other hand, sloppy, vague thinking makes for poor and weak fighters.

Spiritual warfare is a matter of using spiritual weapons. They are the weapons of devotion, character, and thinking. When you think of Daniel, would you say he lived a life of devotion? Was he a man clothed in godly character? Was he a man who thought well and was filled with wisdom? As far as spiritual warfare goes, Daniel did his part. He was devoted, godly, and prayed.

So what was the result of Daniel's playing his part?

III. Daniel's Response and Encouragement

*15 When he had spoken such words to me, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless. 16 And suddenly, one having the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke, saying to him who stood before me, "My lord, because of the vision my sorrows have overwhelmed me, and I have retained no strength. 17 "For how can this servant of my lord talk with you, my lord? As for me, no strength remains in me now, nor is any breath left in me." 18 Then again, the one having the likeness of a man touched me and strengthened me. 19 And he said, "O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!" So when he spoke to me I was strengthened, and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me."
20 Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come. 21 "But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth. (No one upholds me against these, except Michael your prince. **Daniel 11:1** "Also in the first year of Darius the Mede, I, even I, stood up to confirm and strengthen him.)*

I want you to notice how this ends before the vision begins in chapter 11. Once again, Daniel is almost struck dumb. This is not the kind of encounter that you can take lightly. So one touches his lips and enables him to speak. All Daniel can say is, "I am finished! I'm speechless, breathless and without strength. He feels overwhelmed to continue the conversation".

So once again, the angel touches Daniel and speaks words of encouragement. He is greatly beloved and encouraged to be strong. He will need the strength, because the whole vision of chapter 11 and 12 is what the angel is going to relate to him.

Whoever it is, notice how these angels seek to encourage and strengthen Daniel. The angel wants Daniel to know that the battle goes on. He wants Daniel to know that his prayers have won. He wants Daniel to know that he is going off to fight, and Michael will be with him and he will win. He wants Daniel to know that Daniel has played his part and overcome. He prayed and fasted for three weeks, and the answer to that prayer is chapter 11 and 12 of your Bible, prophecies predicting God's sovereign control of history from Daniel's time to the very end.

The angel does not tell Daniel that he failed to bind and rebuke the prince of Persia, or that he had been speaking death over the situation, or that he had not prayed in Messiah's name often enough. He comforts the old man, and says, be strong, be encouraged.

That's God's message to His children today. Be strong, be encouraged. If you are in Christ, seeking to love God, be like Christ, renew your mind, you are fighting the spiritual battle. You are fighting it God's way, using God's weapons, for God's glory.

Who knows what eternity will reveal regarding what your prayers did in the unseen realm? Who knows what your clear thinking, and well-reasoned arguments will have done behind the scenes? Who knows what that day will reveal regarding how your prayer life and your godly character and your love of the Word brought down whole sections of the satanic fortress. The reason is that is is Christ who triumphs through us. It is His victory, fleshed out in our humility.

Remember the hymn?

*Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth His Name, from age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.*