

Angels and Demons

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[0 : 0 0] Our reading today is from Daniel chapter 10, which can be found on page 896 of the Church Bibles. So that's Daniel chapter 10.

In the year of Cyrus, Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel, who was called Belshazzar. Its message was true, and it concerned a great war.

The understanding of the message came to him in a vision. At that time, I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food, no meat or wine touched my lips, and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.

On the 24th day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the Great River, the Tigris, I looked up, and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Euphras around his waist.

His body was like topaz, his face was like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.

[1 : 1 0] I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision. Those who were with me did not see it. But such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision.

I had no strength left. My face turned deathly pale, and I was helpless. Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.

A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said, Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.

And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling. Then he continued, do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.

But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.

[2 : 2 0] While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face towards the ground and was speechless. Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth, and I began to speak. I said to the one standing before me, I am overcome with anguish because of my vision.

My lord, and I feel very weak. How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone, and I can hardly breathe. Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength.

Do not be afraid, you who are highly esteemed, he said. Peace, be strong now, be strong. When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength.

So he said, Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come. But first I will tell you what is written in the book of truth.

No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince. This is the word of the Lord. Well, good morning, St. Silas.

[3 : 29] Thanks so much, Rachel, for reading that for us. And it would be a great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open at Daniel chapter 10. I see a number of new faces here this morning. My name is Martin Ayres. I'm the senior pastor here.

It's great to have you with us. And if you could keep your Bibles open there, you can also find an outline inside the notice sheet if you find that helpful as we look at this portion of God's word.

Now, this chapter has some bewildering events, especially if you're here perhaps as a guest. We're committed as a church, though, to working through books of the Bible chapter by chapter so that we don't just pick the bits that we like and kind of cherry-pick things, but we let God set the agenda for us and allow him to speak the whole of his word to us.

And today we're in this unusual part of the Bible, this style of writing we've been in for a few weeks as a church, called apocalyptic writing. And apocalyptic just means revelation.

It reveals unseen truths to us. Apocalypse doesn't actually mean the end of the world. It means revelation. And this is revealing to us unseen realities about the future that we couldn't know from what we can see and find out through science, and unseen realities about the present, but that are about deep spiritual things that we can't see.

[4 : 50] It's as though God kind of rolls up the kitchen blind to show us what's out there that we couldn't normally find. And he uses very vivid imagery to do that. So let's ask for God's help that his spirit, who inspired Daniel with this dream, would be with us now, and we'd have an encounter with him.

Let's pray together. Gracious Heavenly Father, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him, we pray with great thanks for the opportunity you've given us this morning to hear you speak to us in the scriptures.

And we ask that you will shape and fashion us. You'll give us ears to hear, heads to understand, and hearts that are willing to change and follow you. For we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, a question we could ask ourselves as we come to this chapter is, what do you do when you get what you've always been dreaming of, but you still find life is very tough or sad?

What are you to think when you feel disillusioned because you realize you're never going to make heaven on earth? You know, you get the job that you were praying for and searching for, or you get the award that you were working so hard to achieve, maybe in sport or in something like that.

[6 : 13] Or you get the spouse that you wanted, or the home that you dreamed of. You believe you've got God on your side, and you get what you've been longing for, and yet you still find that life is hard.

Or you still feel afraid. Something like that is happening to Daniel at the beginning of chapter 10. And where people around us might experience that and just grow cynical and just settle for less in life, what Daniel realizes is that at a moment like that, what he needs is understanding from the God of all this.

So in verse 12, the angel that he meets says to him, Do not be afraid, Daniel, since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.

We need understanding like Daniel did. Daniel realized in that scenario that what he needed to do was humble himself before God and seek more from God to make sense of the times he lived in.

Just as we have to make sense of seasons in life where we will feel perplexed. We will feel gutted. We'll feel afraid.

[7 : 31] Now two years before this prayer, Daniel got the thing that he had been praying for his whole adult life. When Daniel was a teenager, he and his friends were ripped away from Jerusalem where they had been living with the temple, where God's people lived in a land where in previous generations they'd enjoy blessing from God.

And they felt that was the place to be with God and with his people. And they were ripped from it and brought into exile in Babylon. And all that time until now, Daniel in his 80s, his heart's longing for him and his people has been that they could go home.

They'd be back home with God in Jerusalem. And we heard his urgent, earnest prayer for that last week in the last chapter, that God would keep his promise and bring his people back.

Then the Persian king, Cyrus, conquers Babylon. And in his first year, he gives permission for the Israelites to go home. It's a phenomenon of human history.

He lets them go back from exile. So Daniel's prayer was answered just as God had said it would be through the prophet Jeremiah. And now it's two years later and we read verse two.

[8 : 47] At that time, Daniel, at that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. And he expresses his sadness physically. He says, verse three, I ate no choice food or it could be pleasant bread.

So he's staying away from the artisan loaves. No meat or wine touched my lips. So he's avoiding the feasts that would be a sign of joy. There'd be a way to enjoy yourself.

He's not going out on a Saturday night anymore. And I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over. So Daniel, he takes the after sun and the moisturizer and the Nivea for men deliveries off the Tesco order.

He's denying himself the things that would make him comfortable to express how he feels on the inside. His sadness that he needs to bring before God.

Why? Well, Daniel could already see that though his people had gone back to the land, I guess he's too old for that, but he's had the joy of seeing the people go back.

[9 : 53] What he's hearing from them is how difficult it is for them. And we know from other books of the Bible, they had a terrible time trying to rebuild Jerusalem. There was opposition from the nations around them.

There was climate difficulties. There was famine. There was poverty. It was a really difficult time. And Daniel has already had a vision forewarning him. It's going to be like that for a long time.

In other words, his prayers have been answered and he hasn't found heaven on earth. And he needs understanding. And Israel is going to need that understanding in the generations to come. Because they're going to go through these seasons of mourning and grief, thinking, well, our prayers were answered, but it's so difficult.

And whenever we find ourselves grieving, the things that just are not right in our world between Jesus' resurrection and his return, we need to hear what Daniel heard here.

So what do we need? Well, God gives Daniel a vision. And our first point this morning is Daniel sees a vision of a glorious being and he can hardly breathe. So let's pick things up at verse five.

[10 : 58] On the riverbank, he says, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen with a belt of fine gold from Euphaz around his waist.

Now, what are we looking at here in this man? It is difficult. It's mysterious. Some people think there are two people in the chapter. There's the man Daniel sees and then there's the man that we've heard comes to be with Daniel and to speak to him.

I think they're the same person through the chapter. But it's difficult. Some people think that the first vision is of God and some people say the first vision is of Jesus, a kind of pre-incarnate Jesus.

For my money, I think we're looking at the same person through the chapter and it's an angel who appears to Daniel and then speaks to Daniel.

But angels like this, they show us a glimpse of God's glory. They have the imprint of God on them because they've been made spectacularly, gloriously to serve God.

[12 : 07] So just as when we see Jesus, we see God in him, in a smaller way, when we see this angel, when Daniel sees this angel, what he's seeing is the glory of God reflected onto a created being.

And even that, this appearance of the image of the likeness of God leaves him, as we'll see in the chapter, overwhelmed. So Daniel's getting this glimpse of the divine through an angel before him.

The linen that he's wearing is like the priests would have worn in the tabernacle. And so it's a picture of this kind of priestly role of serving God in the presence of the throne room of heaven.

It's the clothing for his warrior who serves him. The belt is gold, the body is topaz, so there's this priceless splendor about what he sees. The finest things we could find on earth reflect this angel.

And just picture a being with a face like lightning. Isn't that an extraordinary picture? Picture his eyes like flaming torches. What we're seeing here is uncontrollable energy and power consuming holiness.

[13 : 20] Arms and legs gleam like burnished bronze. It's this display of brilliance. And when he speaks, it's like a million voices together. It's absolutely extraordinary.

So that the people who are with Daniel, they don't even see what he sees. And verse 7, such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves.

So they've gone and Daniel is glued to the spot, gazing at this greatness of the likeness of the glory of God.

And then he crashes out. He says, I had no strength left. My face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. I fell into a deep sleep. My face to the ground.

We get overwhelmed by other people at times, don't we? We get overwhelmed by celebrities. I don't know if you've been close to someone that you have kind of hero worshipped or idolised.

[14 : 19] Last week, my football team, Middlesbrough, played Manchester United in a cup tie at Old Trafford. And so unusual was that match that one of our defenders, Dale Fry, has been reflecting this week on what it was like.

He said, playing against Cristiano Ronaldo, when they were lining up in the tunnel to go on the pitch, he didn't dare look at him because he'd be so overwhelmed. This is the guy I've had posters of on my wall as a kid and I've got to defend against him.

And then he said that when they got out onto the pitch, he did have to look at him because he's a defender and he said, he didn't look real. He's even more beautiful when you see him in real life.

That was his description of playing Ronaldo. And he's a footballer himself. Maybe you've experienced awe like that, being around someone, someone famous.

Or seeing an incredible creature, seeing a whale breach in the ocean, or an eagle soaring and hunting.

[15 : 25] We get overwhelmed. What Daniel sees here is literally out of this world. And the terror is too much for him. Now why does he need to see that?

Why do we need to hear what he saw? It's because the message of Daniel is, despite what you can see, the Lord reigns. The Lord reigns and he's building an everlasting kingdom.

Have confidence in him. And seeing this angel reflecting the glory of that God pushes Daniel to see that however hard things get for you down here, you have to keep your eyes, keep one eye fixed on the God who is up there.

Picture his immensity. Picture his grandeur. And tremble. But be reassured, he is reigning and all the struggles of human history are marked out on his wall planner.

And for us, when we need to see that, we don't just look at Daniel's angel, we can look at the one he was reflecting. Because the Apostle John says in John chapter 1 about being with Jesus, no one has ever seen God but the one and only Son who is in himself God and in closest relationship with the Father has made him known.

[16 : 41] And then when John was on the island of Patmos and had his revelation, in chapter 1 he describes what he saw. He saw Jesus as he is now. And he says of Jesus in Revelation chapter 1, not just an imprint of God but the very, the one who is in very nature God.

he says that he's wearing a robe with a golden sash around his chest and his eyes are blazing fire and his feet are like bronze glowing in a furnace from the heat and his voice is like the sound of rushing waters.

And he says, Jesus says, do not be afraid. I am the first and the last. I am the living one. I was dead and now look, I am alive forever and ever and I hold the keys of death and Hades.

But for Daniel this is terrifying. In fact, most of the rest of the chapter involves Daniel being in bits on the floor and the angel trying to get him back up again so that he can tell him what he needs to tell him that we'll see next week.

Why? Is it because we get too afraid of other things? And the message here is don't be frightened. Whatever you came here today frightened of in your life, don't be frightened.

[17 : 59] Don't be frightened of that. Redirect your fear. We lose that sometimes in the way we talk about God today. We talk about him as though he's kind of a Mr. Nice guy in the sky.

Always friendly, always benevolent. People even talk about their experience of having heard God or seen God as though it's a casual thing. But Daniel chapter 10 shows us that there is nothing casual about God showing up.

This is the man, Daniel, who is accustomed with walking the corridors of West Wing, of being in the Oval Office of Babylon. This is the man who prayed when he was threatened with lions and thrown into a den.

And he's terrified. Because on one level it's not even comforting when God shows up. It's more devastating than it is comforting. But that brings us to our second point.

Daniel is touched by a trustworthy being and he regains his strength. So in verse 7 we heard even the people around Daniel didn't see what he saw. They're overwhelmed with terror.

[19 : 12] And Daniel passes out in verse 9. And then verse 10. A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees.

And while what Daniel sees is terrifying, what he hears bit by bit gradually restores him. We're going to work through it to see that. The contrast in these verses between the vision of God Daniel sees in the representation of the angel and the words of God Daniel hears from the angel.

Twice he's told that he's dearly loved. Verse 11. Daniel, you who are highly esteemed. We saw that last week that this word highly esteemed is translated in other translations.

You who are dearly loved. He says, the angel says, consider carefully the words I'm about to speak to you and stand up for I have now been sent to you.

So now Daniel goes from lying down, passed out, to being on his hands and knees, to standing up. And the angel introduces the vision and Daniel bows down and he's speechless.

[20 : 21] But look at verse 16. Verse 16. Then one who looked like a man touched my lips and I opened my mouth and began to speak.

And he says, I'm overcome with anguish because of the vision, my Lord, and I feel very weak. How can I, your servant, talk with you, my Lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe.

And then we get this tenderness again. Verse 18. The one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. Do not be afraid, you who are dearly loved. He said, peace, be strong now, be strong.

When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, speak, my Lord, since you have given me strength. Daniel is transformed by the kindness and grace of God reflected in this angel and how again and again he touches him and he speaks to him.

And just as Jesus, in his grandeur and radiance, is the fulfillment of what Daniel sees here, in his grace and love, he fulfills what Daniel hears and feels.

[21 : 34] you think of when Jesus walks on the water passing by his disciples in the boat and he sees that they're terrified so he gets into the boat and he says, don't be afraid.

He says to the sinful woman who anoints him at the house of Simon the Pharisee, in front of the Pharisees who judge her, your sins are forgiven, your faith has saved you, go in peace.

Even in his risen glory, he says to a church that has left him out, here I am, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and will eat with them and them with me.

So the gospel according to Daniel chapter 10 is, the God of the Bible is on his throne, he is there, he reigns in terrifying glory, divert your fears onto him.

Don't fear other things, fear him. But that same God comes to you, touches you, speaks his word of grace to you, to strengthen you and he offers you peace with him so that we learn the one we should fear is the one we should trust, the one we can trust.

[22 : 51] And it invites us to apply this revelation of God onto the things that you're afraid of in your life. What are you afraid of? Daniel chapter 10 says, redirect your fear to the one who is worthy of your trust.

Jesus Christ is worthy of your fear with a glory that would overwhelm us, a purity that would consume us. But Jesus Christ is worthy of your trust.

He came to seek and to save lost sinners. He is kind. trust him. It is glorious news. It's glorious news that the one we should really fear is the one we can really trust.

So, divert your fears to the one you can trust. And now we turn to the message from the angel. Our third point is that Daniel is told of a spiritual conflict and his prayers were answered.

So let's pick things up again in verse 12. And the big question for Daniel is, why have you come now? Why has it taken three weeks of grief and prayer?

[24 : 01] Verse 12. Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard and I have come in response to them.

But, the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me 21 days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me because I was detained there with the king of Persia.

Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future for the vision concerns a time yet to come. Well, the clue to understanding these words about prince and king is that Michael, clearly an angel, is described there as a prince.

So we're talking here about beings in the spiritual realm. What the angel tells Daniel is that behind what he can see, the Persian empire, which is very real and very powerful and he serves the Persian emperor, it's ruling the region and behind that there is this deeper spiritual reality.

Just as there is a physical universe, there is a spiritual universe, one that we can't observe. And within that spiritual universe, there are angels, but there are also fallen angels created by God to be majestic and serve him, but who fell and are led now by the prince angel, demon, Satan, and they are bent against God, resolved to try and thwart God's good purposes for the world.

[25 : 36] And this is why we see frightening evil in our world. God's angels are engaged in a great cosmic spiritual war against Satan's demons.

And behind the Persian empire that stands against God's people at that moment in history is a demon inciting those humans to evil behavior against God's people.

It's an extraordinary revelation. We're used to the idea, aren't we, that sometimes what you see on the surfaces in life is only part of the story. It's why there's so much interest in going behind the scenes.

I was at university with a friend, Debs, who, she made a whole film called The Skywalker Legacy, which is a documentary that while they were making the latest trilogy of Star Wars movies, she was on set with a whole other film crew filming them making the film.

and it's a movie that you can watch to see behind the scenes what led to the creation of the Star Wars films. Maybe you could think of when you go to the theater and you sit in the stalls and you watch this production in front of you and you're seeing a story played out in front of you but underneath are the musicians and behind the scenes are the costume designers and the set designers and the director and the producer and there's that crew that run on between scenes when the lights go down and the curtain comes across and they move things around to prepare for the next thing that you'll see and if you went backstage you'd find people running around with props and costumes and changeovers and there's green rooms and dressing rooms well in a similar way God's word says there is a deeper reality behind the scenes of what's going on all around us a cosmic wall and that's a daunting thought isn't it what do we expect is going on behind the scenes of Westminster and Holyrood and the Kremlin we might expect that there will be lobby groups and think tanks and evenings with party donors who set their agendas and make them clear we might expect that there might be a bit of corruption or hidden political agendas maybe senior civil servants who are really running the show but do we also appreciate that behind all of that wherever there is human power walking the corridors are forces of spiritual evil it's a helpful reminder that if you're a Christian your real enemies are not human it can be so easy to rage against people who stand against the church or against our purposes but the Bible says our real enemies are not physical they are spiritual that's where the battle is

[28 : 40] Ephesians chapter 6 is on the sheets where Paul reminds us he writes to the Ephesians our struggle is not against flesh and blood but it is against the rulers against the authorities against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms therefore put on the full armour of God so that when the day of evil comes you may be able to stand your ground and after you have done everything to stand and if that seems daunting then let's notice that Daniel discovers here that his prayers are unbelievably effective so in verse 2 we heard that Daniel had been praying for three weeks and then in verse 13 the angel says to him who's been detained the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me 21 days in other words in some mysterious way the prayers that Daniel was praying were powerful and effective in the heavenly realms to bring about some kind of victory so that God's messenger could come to him now in the bigger picture of God's sovereignty nothing holds God back from accomplishing his purposes in the time that he has set at the same time humanly this is the way that God is pleased to work we see it again and again in the scriptures in God's dealing with humans that he moves his people to pray and then he's pleased to act in response to their prayers and he's done that here with Daniel

Ephesians chapter 6 gives us the same connection that just after Paul says about how we have this spiritual struggle he says put on the full armor of God and then he says pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests with this in mind be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people and we've seen that was the engine room of Daniel's life the lion's den didn't stop him praying and here God's messenger reassures him that his prayers have made this incredible unseen difference in the cosmic war it's not that Daniel was praying about the spiritual warfare that's quite striking isn't it Daniel is not fixated on angels and demons and what's going on in the spiritual realm we know very little about it we saw last week the kind of things Daniel was praying for adoration of God humble confession of sin praying that God would keep his promises that he'd forgive his people and build his kingdom the things we're called to pray for

Daniel was praying for the spiritual battle doesn't dictate the contents of Daniel's prayer but it it dictates the urgency of his prayer life and maybe this news and this vision of God's immensity behind the scenes invites us challenges us to pray bigger prayers that when we pray we wouldn't just pray for things that seem possible could we pray to fill the scope of the grandeur of God honor God and our view of his grandeur and his glory and his brilliance with the size of our prayers folks our time is gone what do we take away from Daniel's fourth vision here he's in mourning because life for God's people is a struggle and what he sees and hears in those three weeks of mourning shows Israel what they're going to need to know for the next five centuries when there are times of mourning and they're waiting for the Messiah to come and what they needed to see and know is what we need to see and know as we live in a world where God reigns but we're waiting for Christ to return and put the world right like Daniel keep your eyes fixed on the God who is really there see Jesus in his glory today keep your ears hearing God's words of grace our Lord Jesus don't be afraid your faith has saved you go in peace the one we should fear is the one we can trust recognize there is a spiritual war going on behind the scenes a cosmic battle but be assured that your prayers in faith for God's kingdom to come are powerful and effective in ways that we could never even understand let's pray together now just a moment of quiet to reflect on God's word to us

Lord Jesus we praise you for your greatness your power your glory your splendor and your majesty as we tremble before you we rejoice that we can trust you we rejoice at your grace your patience with us your invitation that says should we hear your voice and open the door you will come in and eat with us mindful of the spiritual conflict that we cannot see we pray hallowed be your name your kingdom come and your will be done deliver us we pray from the evil one for the kingdom the power and the glory are yours now and forever amen a