

**Daniel 10:1-11:1, No. 15****“Angels and Demons”****March 5, 2017****The Rev. Dr. Robert S. Rayburn**

Daniel chapter 10 is, in effect, the introduction to the final section of the book of Daniel. Chapters 10-12 are a single unit. They amount to a prophecy of the future, with commentary, and, as we will find when we consider chapter 11, a prophecy in some ways unlike any other in the Bible. Tonight, though, we are interested in the introduction to that prophecy.

Once again, Daniel was in a troubled state of mind. He was fasting and praying and, once again, God sent an angel to encourage and comfort him. Daniel’s concerns focused on the future of the people of God. He was an old man. He wasn’t concerned about his own future, but he was very concerned about Israel’s future. And so it was that the vision he received was a prophecy of Israel’s future.

**Text Comment**

- v.1 The third year of Cyrus would have been 536/535 B.C. By that time some of the Jewish exiles had already returned to Jerusalem, as we read in Ezra 1-2. “It was a great conflict” means that the message Daniel was given concerned conflict, even war. And we will discover that was precisely the subject of the vision.
- v.3 As the angel himself will tell us in 12, Daniel had been praying as well as fasting. Fasting and prayer ordinarily go together in the bible. In addition to fasting he was denying himself the oils that were typically used by those who could afford them to moisten and smooth the skin in a climate that was hot and dry much of the year. [Longman, 247] What was he praying about? Well, it seems clear that he was still praying for God’s people, for their repentance and for their future faith. Perhaps he still wasn’t clear as to the meaning of the visions he had received. The vision of the seventy sevens preceded this one, and perhaps he was still laboring over that revelation, as he had been told to do in 9:23. And perhaps it was simply that all the visions seemed to portend so much suffering ahead for the people of God. As v. 12 will indicate, he had been seeking understanding and it was Daniel’s concern to gain understanding that brought help from heaven.
- v.5 Let me just say at this point that there is a longstanding debate as to whether we ought to identify the figure clothed in linen as an appearance of God himself or as an angel. If we have here a theophany, an appearance of God in visible form, as many commentators through the ages have thought, then, it seems to me, we must have a second figure, a different figure in vv. 10ff. It is hard to believe, for example, that God himself would have needed the angel Michael to come to his aid in order to get free of the angel of Persia in order to be able to visit Daniel. Most, but not all of the scholars I am consulting in preparing these sermons favor the view that there is but one heavenly figure in Daniel chapter 10 and he is an angel.

- v.9 In the vision the being spoke, but what he said is not reported until later. But the impression of both what Daniel saw and what he heard caused him to faint dead away. It was the impact of the supernatural realm upon the human mind that explains Daniel's fear and trembling.
- v.11 Shattered by what he had seen and heard, Daniel was helped up first by the touch of an angel's hand and then by the assurance, for the second time (9:23), that he was greatly loved in heaven. This and other data in the chapter suggest that this heavenly being is none other than Gabriel, who visited and spoke with Daniel in chapter 9. But, it must be admitted that the angel is not identified by name.
- v.12 "I have come because of your words." In other words, the angel wouldn't have come had Daniel not prayed! We have not because we ask not.
- v.13 We will learn in v. 21 that Michael had special responsibilities for the people of Israel. Yesterday I happened to be thumbing through an old tome containing various essays by the 17<sup>th</sup> century Reformed theologian Herman Witsius. One of the essays included in the volume was devoted to Michael the archangel. For eighteen pages Witsius argued that Michael was actually another name for the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Reformed theology is as impregnable as it is because it is founded, point by point, upon many statements of the Word of God. No key feature of that theology depends on the interpretation of any single text. But our old authorities and especially the old, great men who formed and fashioned the Reformed faith didn't always interpret the Bible as accurately as we do today. No contemporary Reformed, much less evangelical commentator I am aware of thinks Michael is a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. One of the "chief princes" does not sound to us like the Son of God. ["Exercitatio IV De Michaele," *Hermannii Witsii Miscellaneorum Sacrorum, Tomus Alter*, Utrecht, 1700, 118-136]
- v.19 The principle way God's people are encouraged is by hearing his Word! Never forget that.
- v.20 The cryptic words of the angel are difficult to understand. The general idea seems to be that this angel would leave Daniel to continue his fight with the prince of Persia, the demonic personage who lay behind and encouraged the evil that the Persians were doing, no doubt especially to the people of God. Indeed, the impression seems to be that he had to hurry back to that struggle. That he came at all was thus further evidence of heaven's concern for Daniel! [Lucas, 277] When his battle with the Prince of Persia was over he would have to deal with the Prince of Greece, the beast to follow in the order laid down in the prophecy of chapter 8 and the subject of much of the remaining prophecy. The sense is: "As soon as the conflict with Persia ends, one with Greece will begin." [Driver in Lucas, 278]
- v.21 As difficult to understand as this last comment is, it apparently was meant to inform Daniel of struggles to come. The opposition was great and there were but the two of them to contend with it on Israel's behalf.

11:1 The chapter division is inept. Verse 1 clearly belongs with what precedes it. The “him” at the end of the verse refers to Michael, not to Darius the Mede.

In this shorter sermon this evening, I want simply to reflect with you on the appearance of angels and demons in the book of Daniel and what we are told about them. Daniel is like the rest of the Bible in its revelation of the world of spiritual beings, both good and evil. It tantalizes us with some information, but leaves a host of obvious questions unanswered. Peter Kreeft, one time professor at Calvin College and now Professor of Philosophy at Boston College, wrote a book about angels and demons published in 1995. Kreeft has a lively sense of humor and, in the book, tackles a number of questions that people have about the spiritual world inhabited by these creatures both good and bad. For example, one question he answers is: “Are there ever ‘angels in the outfield’? Do angels ever account for the outcome of baseball games.” And his answer (remember, this was in 1995 when the curse of the Bambino was still in full force):

“Angels wouldn’t do that. But demons might. Especially Red Sox demons. How else has anyone ever been able to account for the supernaturally strange and tortuous history of weird playoff losses? Did you catch a glimpse of horns when that little demon blew that ball through Buckner’s legs with his bad breath?” [105]

I suppose that Prof. Kreeft is more confident that there are angels in the outfield, now that the Red Sox have won a few World Series. The reason we wonder about such things, of course, is that the Bible places it beyond doubt that angels and demons exist and are involved in the world of men, but then tells us almost nothing about *how* they are involved, about what they do and how they do it.

Here, as elsewhere, we learn that angels and demons have authority structures, that they live in some form of organization. Michael, for example, is one of the *chief princes*. So there are angels below him in status and authority. And certain angels and demons have positions of authority over specific human powers or states or governments. There was, for example, a “prince of the kingdom of Persia” and another in a similar position over Greece. Michael is said to be “your prince” in v. 21, presumably the prince of the Jews. And, of course, that means that Gabriel, or whichever angel is speaking in this chapter, is *not* the prince of the Jews; he has some other assignment. In a very important statement in Deut. 32:8, we read this of angels and nations:

“When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples *according to the number of the sons of God.*”

“Sons of God” is a biblical term for angels and demons and so it appears that there is some direct correspondence between the assignment given to angels and the political landscape of human life. Precisely what that correspondence may be who can say, but the very fact that there is a prince of Persia, Greece, or a prince of the Jews forces us to realize that there is a connection between the spiritual world and the powers of the world of men. The prince of Persia, for example, seems clearly to be a demonic power whose special area of responsibility was Persia and whose work, therefore, was to foster Persian opposition to the will of God and to facilitate the Persian rebellion against God that is the driving motivation of the demonic world. Perhaps in

the context, this would mean that this prince goaded and inspired and shamed the Persians and their power structures into oppressing the people of God. [Davis, 145]

But how they do that, how they exercise their influence, the Bible does not say. It never says. How much of what happens on earth is caused by the intervention of those whom the Apostle Paul calls “the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers over this present darkness, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12) is never said. The fact that we are to wrestle against them and resist them is evidence enough that we are affected by this spiritual company. We have adversaries of great power and strength with whom we must reckon. And the fact that angels are described as ministering spirits sent to help those who are inheriting salvation is sufficient evidence that good and holy spiritual powers are fighting for us at the same time. The picture we are given in Daniel 10 is one found in a number of other places in the Word of God. But *how* demons tempt us and *how* angels help us, this we do *not* know because the Bible never says. You remember the remark of the Lord Jesus in 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.”

It is that phrase “their angels” that is the basis of the idea that believers, at least, have *guardian angels*, an angel assigned specifically to their care and to their protection. It could be so. And if it is, doesn’t it change your perspective. Doesn’t it make you think again about what you do in the presence of that angel and how you view others, who have their own angel at their side? But still we know nothing of precisely what a guardian angel does.

And, if not keeping the Red Sox out of the World Series – which, actually, seems to me more like something an angel would do than a demon – is it not likely, given their existence and their involvement in human affairs, that we can at least explain the virulence and the stupidity and the intractability of human evil in part by the influence of the demonic realm? I read recently a new history of the Second World War. I’ve read a lot of WWII history through the years, but this book fascinated me for the information it contained that I had never encountered before. Listen to this.

“In order for the Nazis to exterminate almost two million Polish Jews in less than two years between 1942 and late 1943, they needed to use units such as the Reserve Police Battalion 101... The battalion was made up of middle-aged, respectable working- and middle-class citizens of Hamburg, rather than Nazi ideologues. Peer pressure and a natural propensity for obedience and comradeship, rather than political fervor, seemed to have turned these people into mass murderers. ... They represented a cross-section of German society and no one was coerced into killing Jews or ever punished for refusing to do so. ...when called upon specifically to help in the genocide, between 80 and 90 per cent of Battalion 101 acquiesced without undue complaint. After some initial squeamishness...they ‘became increasingly efficient and callous executioners’.

Only twelve of the battalion’s 500 members – that is 2.4 per cent – actually refused to take part in shooting 1,500 Jews in groups of forty in the woods outside [a Polish village] 50 miles southeast of Lublin on 13 July 1942. [The rest] simply got on with the job of

shooting Jewish men, women and children at point-blank range, even though they knew that there would have been no retribution had they refused. Some reasoned that their non-participation would not alter the Jews' ultimate fate. Although they said [several hundred of these folk were interviewed after the war] they disliked shooting infants and small children, they did it, just as they shot decorated Great War veterans who begged for mercy on account of shared comradeship in the trenches. They found it 'disturbing' that none of the mothers would leave their children and so had to be shot together with them, although 'It was soothing to my conscience to release [that is, kill] children unable to live without their mothers,' said a thirty-five-year-old metalworker from Bremerhaven." [A. Roberts, *The Storm of War*, 224-225]

This is but one particularly gruesome example of what perfectly ordinary human beings can be persuaded to do. *Ordinary people like you and I doing such extraordinary evil*: is that simply the wickedness of the human heart, the plague of sin, or is there something still more sinister at work? Think of abortion in our modern Western context – people not only doing what a generation ago they themselves would have considered morally repugnant, something they would never have considered doing, something literally inhuman, now celebrating their freedom to kill the baby in the womb as the dawning of a new age of liberty and human flourishing. *Isn't it possible that such bestial evil owes its existence at least in part to demonic influences?* Why is evil so persuasive to human beings? Why do they not put up more of a fight? John Newton observed in one of his letters,

“Perhaps such a one as Voltaire would neither have written, nor have been read or admired so much, if he had not been the amanuensis [a secretary] of an abler hand in his own way.” [*Selected Letters* (Baker ed.), 59]

Is there then a demon hovering over the shoulder of many of our anti-Christian writers and film-directors? But, if so, what are the good angels doing and why did it take Gabriel, or whoever the angel of Daniel 10 was, twenty-one days to get free of the prince of the kingdom of Persia? Who can say, when the Bible does not?

But if we cannot say precisely what the spiritual beings are doing in this world and how they affect our lives for good or ill, what is the purpose of our knowing of their existence and of the Bible's teaching us about their great power and influence? What are we to do with that information? After all, the Bible doesn't tell us anything specifically about how to deal with the influence of demon other than what it tells us about how to deal with our own sin. We are never taught how a demonic temptation would be different from one arising out of our own sinful flesh or coming from the world; how if from the devil it must be resisted in some different way. We are told to resist the devil but never precisely what that means, other than to watch and pray or to put our sins to death and practice our new life in Christ.

Surely, one thing we *can* say is that the biblical data, tantalizing but so incomplete, fascinating both for what we are told and what is left unexplained, is intended to cause us wonder, to ponder, and to consider, as Daniel was commanded to consider the information given to him. And surely among those things that can be known is that human life, *and our lives*, are not nearly as small and insignificant as we too often think. Our world, even our small part of that world, is part of

something very much larger, very much greater. There is a universe of war and conflict around us and far too often we wander the battlefield entirely unaware of the desperate combat going on around us, of the corpses that litter the field, or of the strategies being followed by commanders on both sides. This information about the evil princes and Gabriel and Michael is a summons for us to wake up and realize that there is a hell of a lot more going on – and I use the term intentionally – than far too often we realize. It is a call to seriousness, to engagement; it is a call to arms, remembering that our weapons are not those of the world, but the weapons of faith, Daniel’s weapons: fasting and prayer.

Life for believers in this world is hard-going. We know that. There will be, there must be much suffering precisely because we live in the midst of great conflict and adversaries of immense power seek our harm. How much of life’s misery has been inflicted upon us by evil spirits because we are part of the kingdom of God we cannot say – certainly the Jews were exiled to Babylon primarily as punishment for their own sins – but what we certainly can say, even on the basis of the little we are shown of the spiritual realm in Daniel 10, is that there is always a great deal going on behind the scenes that has immense influence upon what happens in the world of men. You and I are deeply involved, inextricably involved, in something very much bigger than we usually realize. And we should live in the active recognition of that fact! A Christian who is alert to the cosmic struggle of which his life is a part will not stick his head out of the foxhole to complain, “Why are they shooting at me? Was it something I said?” He or she will expect that in a desperate battle there will be pain, there will be suffering and there will be death.