



FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

I wonder what you think I'm describing here:

Imagine an individual, holed up in his – or her – room, working with a team of other individuals, some known to them, some not, and their mission is to take down an opposing force that is non-physical in nature, holding people captive, and bent on world domination. So, they commit hours of thought and passion and energy to combating this enemy, an enemy *they* are aware of, even if no-one else is. But they keep working at it, keep pressing on, until, eventually, they take out all the enemy operatives, save the captives, and achieve ... victory (until tomorrow night, at least).

What am I describing? You might assume it's some kind of online shoot 'em up, like *Call Of Duty*, *Battlefield* or *Counterstrike*. But I'm actually talking about something that certain Christians think they're engaged in, on a regular basis: strategic level spiritual warfare, the idea that we can 'take down' demonic territorial spirits, in prayer.

Now, they're kind of right, kind of not. But today's chapter from Daniel is a go-to on this particular subject. Let's take a look.

Daniel 10-11:1

It's 3 years into the administration of Cyrus King of Persia, and we're told that Daniel has been mourning and fasting for 3 weeks. Like every day's a *Coldplay* day.

Why so glum? The repatriation of Jews has begun, along with the rebuilding of the temple. Which should be a 'woo-hoo!' moment, except ... only 42,000 have signed up; the builders are facing opposition; and the one man who would have wanted to go – Daniel – doesn't. Now we don't know if this is because his bosses said no, or because he simply felt too old (in his 80s!) to make the journey. But I think it's safe to say that Daniel, who's been there since his teens, must have felt a little bit down. Or even depressed.

It's against this backdrop that the angel Gabriel appears again, by the river Tigris, in full thermonuclear glory. And he says, "Daniel, I am here to reveal what is really going on around you." And in chs10-11 he describes a war that will take over 5 centuries to unfold ... and the spiritual conflict being fought, behind the scenes.

In the process, he gives Daniel information to help him, and us, play our own part in spiritual warfare. 4 truths:

1) You are greatly loved (vs10-11). Daniel collapses. Gabriel touches him, revives him, and says, "Daniel, you are a man greatly loved / treasured (Hebrew *cha-mudot*)." Twice, in fact! Not tolerated, and certainly not hated. *Loved*.

Daniel needed to hear this. I reckon he must have been feeling pretty miserable about things, perhaps even angry that his prayers hadn't been answered in quite the way he'd hoped. Perhaps even unloved. And this is its own form of spiritual warfare – not on a global scale, but a personal one. Maybe you feel the same way today.

Gabriel goes to the core of Daniel's being and tells him what he means to God. And this is a weapon in itself. In fact, knowing your name is "written in heaven", as Jesus put it (Luke 10:20), is the most powerful one of all.

So, tell yourself each day, "I am greatly loved." Say it now!

2) You are instantly heard (vs12-14). Gabriel says, "Daniel, God heard you the moment you started to pray." But the answer, via Gabriel, has been delayed for 3 weeks / 21 days, as a result of enemy action. As in, demonic action.

Now, notice: Gabriel doesn't say, "Daniel, here's the name of a demon or two: now speak out against them" (he's not even given their names!). Why? Because Daniel's prayers have already been heard – even before he has access to this information! But also, this: prayer is not about challenging *demons* – it's about talking to? God.

I.e. it's not about *what* you know, but *who*. And *who* you know has a plan that is bigger than us, a plan that He is bringing to fruition – in His time. God is big enough to fight His own battles! And this battle is definitely *His* (2 Chronicles 20:15).

What we need to do is talk to Him. And know that He hears us.

3) You are unwittingly strong (vs15-19). Daniel feels like he can't handle what is going on around him, so Gabriel gives him the strength he needs –

and reminds him of where that strength comes from. And where our strength comes from.

But again, notice what Gabriel *doesn't* say: "Daniel, if you use this prayer-formula, or speak words of faith into your life, or decree and declare victory over this situation, then success will be yours." Listen, you don't get to call the shots: that's God's job. Your job is to remain faithful to Him. But if you need strength, God can give it to you.

This is important, because like Daniel, we will all, at some point, feel weak, tired, insignificant, like we are no match for our circumstances. The lesson here is that true strength is dependant, not on *your* abilities, but *His*. As David sang:

"The LORD is my strength and my shield" (Psalm 28:7).

4) You are ultimately victorious (vs20-11:1). Gabriel gives Daniel a view of what is really going on around him: that the nations are under the sway of some powerful demonic forces, but God's forces are also present. And superior.

Moses in Deuteronomy 32:8 says something similar (at least in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint). But why is Daniel told this? Is it so he can intervene on a strategic level? Draw up a spiritual map of the world and begin praying against this demon or that? Take out some top-level evil spirits? No. It's so he / we can find hope.

Hope is precious. It can be easy, in our materialistic age, to think that what our senses experience is all there is – and feel hopeless when it's gone. What we need is a vision of a victory beyond it. And a cast-iron one, at that.

In Jesus, and in scriptures like this, that is what we have.

Arm Up

So, what do we learn from this strange chapter? That we are all caught up in a spiritual war; a cosmic conflict; a clash between the forces of good and evil, in 'heavenly places.' And one that spills out into the geopolitical situations we can see around us. And the personal ones, too.

Now some people can be ignorant of such things; others, obsessed. Neither extreme is healthy or helpful. But it's important to be aware –

Of the fact that Jesus has already won.

And given us an armoury in the meantime.

With that in mind, let's read these powerful words from Ephesians 6:10-13, then pray for each other.