

Prayer: A Warrior's Weapon

by [John Piper](#)

In Daniel 10, the prophet receives a word from the Lord (v. 1) — a vision of conflict that stunned him with its greatness. So Daniel set himself with tears and fasting and prayer to seek the meaning of the vision, and for three weeks he wrestled in prayer over this vision and sought to know God's will.

After three weeks he went out to the banks of the Tigris River (v. 4). There he had a vision that was so awesome he could hardly bear it. To make matters worse (in v. 10), a hand reached out and touched him so that he shook terribly on his hands and knees. Then the voice said (vv. 11–12): “O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you.... 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.”

Now this is immensely important for understanding prayer. Notice the words: “I have come because of your words.” Put that together with the words in verse 11: “I have been sent to you.” That is, God sent him. So the point is that God answered Daniel's prayer as soon as he began to pray three weeks ago. “From the first day that you humbled yourself before your God your words [your prayers] have been heard, and I have come because of your words [your prayer].”

So this heavenly being has come because Daniel prayed and humbled himself before God and fasted. And the three-week delay was not because God took three weeks to hear. What was it then?

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.” The reason the messenger of God was detained is because a spiritual being called “the prince of the kingdom of Persia” stood against him. And the reason this angelic messenger got free from this opposition was because the angel Michael came to help him.

This is the clearest example in all the Bible of what is called by some people a “territorial spirit.” Verse 13 refers to “the prince of the kingdom of Persia.” The natural meaning of this phrase would be that among the supernatural beings opposed to God, at least one is assigned to a territory or, more accurately, to a kingdom, in this case Persia. Presumably his job is to darken the people of Persia — to keep them from having the truth and the light of God's Word.

But this spirit is not the only one mentioned. Look at verse 20–21: “Then he [the messenger from God] said, ‘Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince.’”

So it appears that there was a spirit over Persia and a spirit over Greece. But it also seems that Michael, the good angel, has some special assignment for Israel, because it says at the end of verse 21: “Michael, your prince.” And the “your” there is plural. This is not a reference to Daniel’s guardian angel, but to Israel’s guardian angel.

How then shall we do ministry in view of this reality of territorial spirits? First, we ought to take the supernatural seriously and realize that we are in a warfare that cannot and should not be domesticated by reinterpreting everything in the biblical worldview so that it fits nicely with secular, naturalistic ways of thinking about the world. Secondly, notice that Daniel’s prayer that has such powerful effects in the spiritual realm did not focus on angels and territorial spirits. Rather, he was wrestling for truth and for the good of God’s people. He was totally shocked when an angel appeared to him. And he knew nothing about the conflict with the prince of the kingdom of Persia.

But it’s no accident that the messenger said that his struggle with the prince of Persia lasted exactly the same amount of time that Daniel’s fasting and prayer did — twenty-one days. The reason for this is that the warfare in the spirit realm was being fought in a real sense by Daniel in the prayer realm.

And so it is with more of our prayers than we realize. But the point is this: Daniel’s praying was not about angels. And probably ours shouldn’t be either. We should wrestle in prayer and fasting for the things that we know are God’s will in our lives and our families and our church and our city and our world. But by and large we should probably leave it to God how He will use angels to get His work done. If God shows us more, we will use it. But the essence of the matter is not knowing the spirits but knowing God and praying in the power of Holy Spirit.

So let us be about prayer with all our might. May the Lord make us a people who pray like Daniel.

