The Spiritual Warfare, Part 1: Prayer and Angels

inTro

Read This Week’s Passage:
Daniel 10

WHEN GOD LEAVES YOU ON READ

In 2014, a Baltic fisherman found an intact message in a bottle. Using the postcard inside, researchers managed to track down the author, Richard Platz, who was twenty years old when he threw the bottle into the sea. Platz had passed away, but they located his granddaughter, Angela Erdmann, and presented the bottle and its contents to her. Though mostly illegible, the message inside asked the finder to return it to Platz’s home address in Berlin. It took over a century for the bottle to finally be delivered.

Our prayers are heard in heaven the moment they’re thought or verbalized. There’s no need to send a message in a bottle, hoping it will get to God sometime in the next century. However, God does not typically reply to us immediately with an audible voice or a text message. Sometimes His answer comes to us through the prayerful application of biblical principles in our thinking and decision-making. Other times, His response may come through fulfillment of a specific prayer. Sometimes the lack of an answer is the answer. God’s answers come in His own time and often in unexpected ways. Whether the wait is short or long, we can be confident that He does hear us and He will respond.

Prayers and intercessions make a profound difference, for they directly impact the supernatural world. As we will see in this week’s primary passage, our prayers may at times spark intense spiritual conflicts that cause delays in God’s response. I hope this week’s Bible study from Daniel 10 will help you better discern the unseen struggle behind our prayers.
Write out Daniel 10 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out verses 12–14. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
Daniel was a man of prayer. No threats of persecution or death could hinder him from worshiping God and praying to Him. He knew the power of prayer and deep communion with God. In chapter 10, we learn that Daniel was praying and fasting for three weeks in the first month of the year (vv. 2–4), which is when the Jews celebrated Passover. This event is the anniversary of when God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt—generally a solemn yet happy time, but for Daniel, who was living in Babylonian captivity, the commemoration served only to remind him of Israel’s need for another deliverance home. The burden on his heart outweighed his desire to feast and celebrate. It was this sober realization that drove him to engage in serious, intentional, and intense intercessions for three weeks. He understood that prayer not only affected his own heart in spiritual ways but also had a real impact on the world, both visible and invisible.

When a heavenly messenger finally appeared to Daniel, he made a very insightful comment: “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” (Dan. 10:12, emphasis added). We learn two things from this statement: 1. when we pray, we are heard immediately, and 2. our words can set celestial beings in motion. This alone should awaken us to the incredible power of prayer.

Interestingly, when Daniel prayed in chapter 9, he experienced virtually no delay before the answer came, but he had to wait three weeks in chapter 10. Fortunately, verse 13 gives a reason for the angel’s belated appearance: “The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days.” Though we aren’t given many details, we can conclude that the angels are very busy in this great controversy. Sometimes they must withstand various supernatural struggles and demonic resistance toward their activity. It’s reasonable to assume that Daniel’s prayer in chapter 10 was similar to the one in chapter 9; both were likely prayers for His people and for the fulfillment of God’s purpose through them. The supernatural battle for the Persian prince’s mind and subsequently his decisions regarding God’s people was intense. Daniel couldn’t see the battle that unfolded because of his prayers. He may not have expected it to take so long, but he didn’t stop interceding just because there was no immediate answer.

As we’ve noted, there are rules of engagement that govern the great controversy. This story suggests that intercessory prayers give God the right to deploy more supernatural forces to influence the hearts of those being prayed for. It shows us the importance of continued intercessory prayers for people and situations, and it encourages us not to give up when there seem to be no answers to our requests. There may be a larger battle going on behind the scenes. With this in mind, why not pray right now for the lost people you know?
HEAVEN’S SPECIAL FORCES

If you visit certain cathedrals or art museums that display Christian paintings, you may come across angels portrayed as fat babies floating on clouds. In Western art, this practice is thought to have originated in the Renaissance period when artists often drew inspiration from ancient Greek and Roman art, which frequently depicted Cupid, the god of love, as a winged child. Some painters may have chosen to portray angels as babies to emphasize their innocence and purity.

The Bible, however, paints a very different picture of the holy messengers. From Scripture, we know that angels are created, supernatural, celestial beings who hold extraordinary power. Just think—in one night, one angel from heaven destroyed the entire Assyrian army of 185,000 soldiers (2 Kings 19:35). God’s heavenly forces include millions (Dan. 7:10) of angels who are eager to go on His missions and do His bidding. We’re also told that angels sometimes appear to be clothed in intense brightness—shining with the “glory of the Lord” (Luke 2:9), which often overwhelms and frightens the people they appear to (Matt. 28:2–4). Angels have wings and can fly swiftly (Exod. 25:20; Ezek. 10:5–21; Isa. 6:2–6; Dan. 9:21), but in many biblical stories, they appear to be human (Gen. 19:1–16; Heb. 13:2), which tells us they can supernaturally change their appearance.

Angels have played a major role in the great controversy from the very beginning. After all, Satan used to be a covering cherub named Lucifer—one of the highest-ranking angels—and the rebellion started with him before spreading to a third of all the angels (see Rev. 12:4, 9). Those who remained loyal to God fulfill various duties in heaven and earth, which keep them busy going back and forth between the two (Gen. 28:12). These powerful beings are completely devoted to accomplishing God’s mission of saving you and me (Ps. 103:20, 21). Their work includes delivering information from the throne room to the believer (Dan. 10:11), serving as agents of God’s judgment (2 Sam. 24:16; 2 Thess. 1:6–8), protecting God’s people, and delivering them from harm in the most extreme circumstances (Dan. 6:22; Acts 5:19, 20; 12:7–10)—all as God wills it.

In His infinite wisdom, God involved the unfallen angels in His work of redemption. They get a front-seat view and experience of how it looks and feels to live in the middle of this controversy. They are currently witnessing the results of their former leader’s rebellion. At the same time, they get to watch God’s mercy and grace in action by seeing the wonderful work accomplished by Jesus’ sacrifice and ministry as High Priest. They will never personally experience salvation from sin, but they better understand the depths of God’s love for His creations as they witness all He does to save sinners.

It’s fascinating to know we have these celestial beings as helpers and protectors even if we don’t see them. We are not left alone in the spiritual war against Satan and sin. All of heaven is poured out in aid and support for God’s beloved children.

Read more at www.inversebible.org/GC08-4
What relationship do the following verses have with Daniel 10?

Other heavenly messengers:
- Daniel 9:20–23
- Revelation 1:10–18
Michael the Archangel:
- Daniel 12:1–3
- Jude 1:9
- Revelation 12:7–9
Resisting the devil:
- Ephesians 6:10–18
- Matthew 4:11

What other verses come to mind in connection with the primary passage?

Review your memorized verse from Daniel 10.
YOUR GREAT PRINCE

There's a great benefit to having an older sibling who cares for you and protects you, especially when you're a child. If you're being bullied by other kids, for instance, you know you have someone you can call to for help. Since you're reading this, it's safe to assume you probably don't need such physical protection from an older sibling anymore, but in the spiritual realm, we are all as vulnerable as a young child. The great controversy is more brutal and dangerous than any bully in the schoolyard could ever be. Thankfully, we have a big Brother who can help. When we feel the enemy closing in, we can call on the One who cares for us and protects us, because “He is not ashamed to call [us] brethren” (Heb. 2:11).

Jesus also pays attention to the angels’ needs and acts as the reinforcements in their fight against the enemy. In Daniel 10, we find Jesus providing backup to a very prominent angel. Though not mentioned by name, it’s reasonable to conclude that the angelic being of verse 11 is the same angel who appears in the previous two chapters, identified as the angel Gabriel in Daniel 8:16. In chapter 8, this angel came to explain the 2,300-day prophecy, which foretold the cleansing of the sanctuary (vv. 14–16), and in chapter 9, he delivered the 70-week prophecy that specifies the timing of the Messiah's first coming (vv. 21–24).

In chapter 10, the angelic being says, “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” (v. 13). In the fight over the prince of Persia, even Gabriel had to call for backup.

Michael is first introduced in the book of Daniel (10:13; 12:1) and is only mentioned again in Jude and Revelation. There are several indicators that Michael is not simply the name of another angel but more of a title for none other than Jesus Christ. First, the name Michael means “Who is like God”—a perfect title for Jesus, who is part of the Godhead and was literally God manifested in human flesh (John 1:14; 14:9). Second, while angels such as Gabriel request backup at times, Michael never needs backup as He is always victorious. Nothing can stand against Him, including the devil (Dan. 10:13; 12:1; Jude 1:9; Rev. 12:7–10). Third, Michael is “the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people” (Dan. 12:1). A prince serves as a chief or commander, which aptly describes Jesus’ leadership role over the angels (e.g., Isa. 9:6; Acts 3:15). Michael is also referred to as an archangel (Jude 1:9), which in this case does not indicate that He is a created being, as some have suggested. Rather, it's because He serves as the leader of the angels. Paul also acknowledged that the title of archangel belonged to Jesus when he referred to Jesus' voice as that of an archangel (1 Thess. 4:16; cf. John 5:25).

Jesus is our divine Prince of Peace, our Warrior who fights for His children. He is the Archangel, the Leader of the angels, and at His word, legions jump into action (Matt. 26:53). With such assurance, power, and support, who can stand against us? We have a divine big Brother as our protector. His presence and strength induce fear among the demonic forces, and at the mere mention of His name, Satan and all his host tremble.
THE MIGHTY STRUGGLE

“While Satan was striving to influence the highest powers in the kingdom of Medo-Persia to show disfavor to God’s people, angels worked in behalf of the exiles. The controversy was one in which all heaven was interested. Through the prophet Daniel we are given a glimpse of this mighty struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. For three weeks Gabriel wrestled with the powers of darkness, seeking to counteract the influences at work on the mind of Cyrus; and before the contest closed, Christ Himself came to Gabriel’s aid. ‘The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days,’ Gabriel declares; ‘but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.’ Daniel 10:13. All that heaven could do in behalf of the people of God was done. The victory was finally gained; the forces of the enemy were held in check all the days of Cyrus, and all the days of his son Cambyses, who reigned about seven and a half years.” (Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* [1917], 571, 572.)

“Heavenly beings are appointed to answer the prayers of those who are working unselfishly for the interests of the cause of God. The very highest angels in the heavenly courts are appointed to work out the prayers which ascend to God for the advancement of the cause of God. Each angel has his particular post of duty, which he is not permitted to leave for any other place. If he should leave, the powers of darkness would gain an advantage....

“Day by day the conflict between good and evil is going on. Why is it that those who have had many opportunities and advantages do not realize the intensity of this work? They should be intelligent in regard to this. God is the Ruler. By His supreme power He holds in check and controls earthly potentates. Through His agencies He does the work which was ordained before the foundation of the world.

“As a people we do not understand as we should the great conflict going on between invisible agencies, the controversy between loyal and disloyal angels. Evil angels are constantly at work, planning their line of attack, controlling as commanders, kings, and rulers, the disloyal human forces.... I call upon the ministers of Christ to press home upon the understanding of all who come within the reach of their voice, the truth of the ministra-

“This is our only safety. We must pray as did Daniel, that we may be guarded by heavenly intelligences. As ministering spirits angels are sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. Pray, my brethren, pray as you have never prayed before. We are not prepared for the Lord’s coming. We need to make thorough work for eternity.—(The S.D.A. Bible Commentary 4:1173.)” (Ellen G. White, *Prayer* [2002], 254, 255.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

Why is it important to persist in prayer even when there seems to be no answer?

How do we discern the difference between God answering our prayers with a “no” versus telling us to wait?

What experiences have you had where God answered your prayer in a different way and time than you expected?

How do intercessory prayers impact the great controversy?

In what ways do angels assist and protect God’s people according to the Bible?

What evidence supports the idea that Michael is a title for Jesus?

Have you ever encountered an angel or experienced divine protection from what would have been certain harm? Please share!

How would you respond to someone who asks why bad things happen to good people?