

## Spiritual Warfare – What Is It? Should I Believe It?

1. Warm-up: On Sunday, Jeff invited us to ask hard questions about the biblical concept of angels. He said, “Belief Without Questioning = Gullibility,” whereas “Belief With Questioning = Well-Founded Faith.” But churches often discourage tough questions. Have you ever ask a tough question in church that was not well received?
2. Daniel 10 tells a dramatic story about angels. Daniel’s people, the Israelites, were victims of broad geopolitical shifts taking place in the ancient Middle East. The Israelites were being held captive as exiles in a foreign land. Daniel was desperate to know what the future held for his people. So he lifted earnest prayers for God to show him the future. Read Daniel 10:4-19, as printed on p. 3.
  - a. When people in the Bible encounter angels, they usually shake with fear and need reassurance. Why do you suppose that is?
  - b. In Jewish theology, Michael was the patron angel of Israel who did battle against Israel’s cosmic enemies. The Prince of Persia mentioned here was not a human prince, but rather a fallen angel who battled on behalf of Israel’s enemies. Michael was dispatched to fight against the Prince of Persia, so the other unnamed good angel could break free and appear to Daniel. All of this suggests that our life here on planet earth is impacted by powerful unseen spiritual forces – both good and bad. Paul describes it this way: “Our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against spiritual forces of evil in the high places.” Ephesians 6:12. Does this resonate with you? As you go about your daily life, do you sometimes feel as though you’re being opposed by powerful unseen forces? If so, what makes you feel that way?
3. Jeff invited us to ask three hard questions about angels. **First Question: Is it reasonable to believe angels exist?** Jeff pointed to all the different levels of creatures we see in the observable part of creation – ranging all the way from single-cell amoebas, to insects, to birds, to octopuses, to us humans. Jeff said, “Everywhere around us we see a God of infinite creativity creating level after level of creatures. So why would God stop with us humans? Why wouldn’t God go on to create levels of being above us (i.e., angels) who have even greater power and sophistication?” How does this line of thought sit with you? Do you find it persuasive? Why or why not?
4. **Second Question: If angels exist, is it reasonable to believe that what happens in their realm can affect what happens in our physical world?** Jeff suggested we should be guided by empirical evidence, noting that in every culture across time people describe encounters with angelic spirit beings. He shared the story of Jose Alvarado who, when in intensive care with COVID, was approached by four angels who turned him over in bed and healed him.

- a. Have you ever had an angelic encounter or known someone who did?
  - b. Often people who readily believe in good angels hesitate to embrace the idea of bad angels. Why is that?
  - c. Jeff shared a couple stories of rational people who've encountered evil spirits. He relayed Tom Maxwell's story about his family's vivid encounters with evil spirit creatures when they lived in a house in North Carolina. Jeff also described the strange capabilities of a woman who felt she was demon possessed, as observed by clinical psychiatrist Dr. Richard Gallagher and his research team. The woman was able to levitate, move objects telepathically, know things about people she had not met, and speak recognizable languages she had never learned. Once again, encounters like this cut across all cultures across time. Jeff reasoned that if God created good angels, it's likely that some of them (like humans) would rebel and become evil – and that stories like those above suggest empirically that this is what's happened. What do you think? Do you believe evil spirits exist?
  - d. If some angels have go bad, why wouldn't God simply eliminate them? Does the following verse suggest a plausible answer? “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping promises, as some understand slowness. God is patient, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.” I Peter 3:8.
5. **Third Question: If there are spirit beings whose existence affects our physical reality, what does this mean for us?** Jeff said it means that, “Every battle we experience here on earth has both a physical and spiritual dimension. Therefore, it is not enough to respond to our battles only on the physical plane. We also have to respond on the spiritual plane. We have to fight spirit with spirit. If we don't, we're setting ourselves up for failure, no matter how well we respond on the physical level.”
- a. After warning us about evil spirit beings, the Apostle Paul said, “Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. . . . Fasten the belt of truth around you waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. . . . Take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times.” Ephesians 6:13. What's the essence of what Paul is recommending here? Sum up his advice in your own words. What's the best strategy for equipping ourselves to triumph over spiritual warfare against us?
  - b. How does wrapping ourselves in goodness, i.e., living the highest spiritual values, prepare us to prevail against evil spiritual energy?
  - c. How does worship prepare us to prevail against evil spiritual energy?
  - d. How does prayer better equip us to prevail against evil spiritual energy?

- e. Sum up how you feel about this conversation we've had. (It's ok to disagree!)

## **Daniel 10:4-19**

<sup>4</sup>On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris), <sup>5</sup>I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist. <sup>6</sup>His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the roar of a multitude. <sup>7</sup>I, Daniel, alone saw the vision; the people who were with me did not see the vision, though a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled and hid themselves. <sup>8</sup>So I was left alone to see this great vision. My strength left me, and my complexion grew deathly pale, and I retained no strength. <sup>9</sup>Then I heard the sound of his words; and when I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a trance, face to the ground.

<sup>10</sup> But then a hand touched me and roused me to my hands and knees. <sup>11</sup>He said to me, 'Daniel, greatly beloved, pay attention to the words that I am going to speak to you. Stand on your feet, for I have now been sent to you.' So while he was speaking this word to me, I stood up trembling. <sup>12</sup>He said to me, 'Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. <sup>13</sup>But the prince of the kingdom of Persia opposed me for twenty-one days. So Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, and I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia, <sup>14</sup>and have come to help you understand what is to happen to your people at the end of days. For there is a further vision for those days.'

<sup>15</sup> While he was speaking these words to me, I turned my face towards the ground and was speechless. <sup>16</sup>Then one in human form touched my lips, and I opened my mouth to speak, and said to the one who stood before me, 'My lord, because of the vision such pains have come upon me that I retain no strength. <sup>17</sup>How can my lord's servant talk with my lord? For I am shaking, no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me.'

<sup>18</sup> Again one in human form touched me and strengthened me. <sup>19</sup>He said, 'Do not fear, greatly beloved, you are safe. Be strong and courageous!' When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, 'Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.'