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Modern Myths About Satan and Spiritual Warfare

By David Servant

MYTH #2:

“There are constant battles in the spiritual realm between God’s angels and Satan’s angels. The outcome of those battles is determined by our ‘spiritual warfare.’”

In the previous chapter, we learned from the book of Revelation that there will one day be a war in heaven between Michael and his angels and Satan and his angels. Other than that, there is only *one* other angelic battle which Scripture mentions, found in the tenth chapter of Daniel.¹

Daniel tells us that he had been mourning for three weeks during the third year of the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia, when an angel appeared to him by the Tigris River. The purpose of the angel’s visit was to impart to him understanding concerning Israel’s future. During their conversation, the unnamed angel said to Daniel:

“Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. But the *prince of the kingdom of Persia* was withstanding me for twenty-one days; *then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me*, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia” (Dan. 10:12-13, emphasis added).

Daniel learned that his prayer had been heard three weeks prior to his encounter with this angel, but that it had taken the angel three weeks to get to him. The reason for the angel’s delay was because “the prince of the kingdom of Persia” had withstood him.

¹ Two possible objections answered: (1) Jude mentions a dispute between Michael and Satan about the body of Moses, but there is no mention of an actual battle. In fact, Jude tells us that Michael would “not dare pronounce against him [Satan] a railing judgment, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you’” (Jude 1:9). (2) When Elisha and his servant were surrounded by a Syrian army in the city of Dothan, Elisha prayed for God to open his servant’s eyes (2 Kings 6:15-17). Consequently, his servant saw “horses and chariots of fire” which we assume were mounted and occupied by an army of angels in the spiritual realm. This is not, however, a definite indication that these angels had been or were about to be involved in a battle with demonic angels. Angels are used at times by God to execute His wrath against wicked human beings, an example being the slaughter of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers by one angel, recorded in 2 Kings 19:35.

He was able to break through, however, when Michael, “one of the chief princes,” came to help him.

When the angel was about to depart from Daniel, he said to him,

“Do you understand why I came to you? But I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, the prince of Greece is about to come. However, I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth. Yet there is no one who stands firmly with me against these forces except Michael your prince” (Dan. 10:20-21).

Several interesting facts can be learned from this passage of Scripture. Again we see that God’s angels are not all-powerful, and that they can actually be involved in fighting wicked angels. (It would be interesting to know just how spirit-beings fight, wouldn’t it? Frank Peretti’s fictional works certainly have supplied us with vivid images to fill our imaginations.)

Second, we learn that some angels (such as Michael) are more powerful than others (such as the one who spoke with Daniel).

Questions for Which We Have No Answers

We may ask “Why didn’t God send *Michael* with the message for Daniel in the first place so that there would not have been a three-week delay?” We don’t know that answer to that question. *Perhaps* there was something God wanted that particular angel to learn. Angels are not all-knowing, and thus would have the capacity to gain more knowledge if God so willed it. Scripture tells us they are curious (see 1 Pet. 1:12).

Or, perhaps God wanted Daniel to learn perseverance in prayer.

The fact is, however, that the Bible doesn’t tell us why God sent an angel whom He *undoubtedly knew* would not be able to break past the “prince of Persia” without the help of Michael. In fact, we have no idea why God would use *any* angel to deliver a message to someone! Why didn’t He go personally, or speak to Daniel audibly, or bring Daniel temporarily to heaven to tell him? We just don’t know the answers.

But does this passage prove that there are constant battles in the spiritual realm between God’s angels and Satan’s angels? No, it only proves that, several thousand years ago, there was *one three-week struggle* between one of God’s weaker angels and one of Satan’s angels named “the prince of Persia,” a battle, which, if God had so willed, would never have occurred. *The only other angelic battle mentioned in all of the Bible is the one future war in heaven, recorded in the book of Revelation.* That’s it. There *may* have been other angelic battles that have occurred, but it would be an assumption on our part to so conclude.

Quite obviously, the subject of angelic battles in the spiritual realm is not nearly as important as some make it out to be, as proven by the fact that there is so little reference to the subject in the Bible. How this could become the primary focus of a church or someone’s ministry is difficult to understand.

A Myth Based Upon a Myth

Does this story of Daniel and the prince of Persia prove that our spiritual warfare can determine the outcome of angelic battles? Again, this idea *assumes* (based upon a few scriptures) that there *are* regular angelic battles! But let’s take a leap in the dark and say that, yes, there are regular angelic battles. Does this story about Daniel prove that our spiritual warfare can determine the outcome of angelic battles that perhaps do occur?

The question is often asked by those who promote this particular myth, “What if Daniel had given up after one day?” The answer to that question, of course, no one actually knows, because the fact is that Daniel didn’t stop seeking God in prayer until the unnamed angel arrived. The implication in asking it, however, is to convince us that

Daniel, through continued spiritual warfare, was the key to the unnamed angel's breakthrough in the heavenlies. If Daniel had quit doing spiritual battle, supposedly the angel would never have made it past the prince of Persia. They want us to believe that we, like Daniel, must continue in spiritual battle, or else some evil angel may triumph over one of God's angels.

First, may I point out that Daniel was not "doing spiritual warfare"—he was *praying to God*. There is no mention of him saying anything to any demonic angels, or binding them, or "warring" against them. Daniel, in fact, *had no knowledge that there was any on-going angelic battle until three weeks had passed and the unnamed angel appeared to him*. He spent those three weeks fasting and seeking God.

So let us rephrase the question: If Daniel had quit praying and seeking God after one or two days, would that unnamed angel have failed to get God's message through to him? We don't know. May I point out, however, that the unnamed angel never said to Daniel, "It's a good thing you kept praying, or else I would never have made it." No, the angel gave credit to *Michael* for his breakthrough. Obviously it was *God* who sent the unnamed angel *and* Michael, and He sent them in response to Daniel's prayer for understanding of what was to take place in Israel's future.

It would be an assumption to think that if Daniel had stopped fasting or seeking God, God would have said, "O.K. you two angels, Daniel has stopped fasting and praying, so even though I sent one of you to take a message to him on the first day he started praying, forget about getting that message to Daniel. It looks like there never will be an eleventh or twelfth chapter in Daniel's book."

Daniel obviously did persevere in *prayer* (not "spiritual warfare"), and God responded by sending angels. We, too, should persevere in prayer to God, and if God so wills, our answer could come by the agency of an angel. Angels exist, at least in part, to assist God and us (see Heb. 1:13-14). But don't forget that there are plenty of examples of angels delivering important messages to biblical people where no mention is made of anyone praying a single prayer, much less praying for three weeks.² We need to stay balanced on this. Furthermore, there are scores of instances of angels who gave messages to biblical people that include no mention of those angels having to fight demonic angels on the way from heaven. Those angels *may* have had to fight evil angels in order to deliver their messages, but if they did, we don't know about it, because the Bible doesn't tell us.

A scripture quite worthy of our remembrance is also one that is very appropriate in ending this chapter: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever..." (Deut. 29:29). Let's walk in the light of what God has revealed to us in His Word and let Him keep His secrets. Battles between God's angels and Satan's angels make for great fiction, but you shouldn't base your prayer-life upon fiction.

Myth #2: "There are constant battles in the spiritual realm between God's angels and Satan's angels. The outcome of those battles is determined by our 'spiritual warfare.'"

The truth is that we know of only *one* angelic battle in the past and *one* that will occur in the future. If there are any others, there is no biblical evidence that we can do "spiritual warfare" and help God's angels win their battles. When our prayers are in accordance with God's will, they can, of course, make a big difference as to what happens on this earth. And if in answering our prayers God decides to use angels, that is His business. From the very limited amount of Scripture dedicated to the subject, it is obvious that God does not want our focus to be on angelic warfare.

² See, for example, Matt. 1:20; 2:13,19; 4:11; Luke 1:11-20, 26-38.