

why God delays answering

The ancient art of war

KEY TEXT—DANIEL 10

IS GOD IMAGINARY?

Why is it that sometimes when we pray—particularly when we pray for something that is very important—but we don't seem to hear an answer?

- You have a child that has abandoned God and you pray for their conversion—but God appears silent
- You are praying for guidance about what to do next in your life—but you hear no direction
- You pray for God to remove some defect of character that disturbs you—but God appears deaf as nothing happens

Have you been praying for something recently and received no answer? Have you been tempted to think God is imaginary?

A GREAT BATTLE—DANIEL 10

There are many biblical explanations for God's apparent silence, but now I will consider one reason, illustrated in Daniel's prayer in Daniel 10. Daniel is given a revelation which is about a war (verse 1).

This is no small revelation. The war concerns the climax of human history—a revelation about the conclusion of the cosmic battle between Jesus and Satan. This core revelation comes later in Daniel 11-12 but it comes in response to Daniel's urgent praying described at the beginning in verse 2.

Daniel has already received prophetic visions of future in Daniel 7, 8, and 9. But what will happen at the very end of these visions? At the same time, closer to home in Daniel's time, a remnant of God's people has already returned to Jerusalem to rebuild it, but are currently facing great opposition—so what will happen to them? Daniel is distressed and so fasts for 3 weeks asking for God to give him understanding about the fate of God's people.

Interestingly, Daniel begins this fast around the time of Passover which celebrated Israel's escape from slavery which parallels Daniel's prayer focus on the fate of God's people in exile. Consequently Daniel is given a vision of a man that looks like Jesus in the book of Revelation (Daniel 10:4-6).

Battle for the mind

Daniel is overwhelmed (Daniel 10:7-9). But the scene changes as an interpreting angel appears, perhaps Gabriel, begins an explanation (Daniel 10:10-14).

Daniel is fasting to understand the future of God's people whose situation seems to be in great peril, both locally in Jerusalem and prophetically at the end of time. Now a vision

is given to him, but notice verse 12-13—while God heard Daniel's prayer and this angel has come in response to his prayer, the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted him and so the angel was delayed in bringing Daniel an answer.

This is the only story in the Bible where we are shown the supernatural battle between angels. But why now?

The main protagonists

- **Daniel**—praying about the future of God's people
- **The angel**—come in response to Daniel's prayer
- **Prince of the Persian kingdom**—who resisted God's angel for 3 weeks—this is Satan or one of his angels
- **Michael**—another name for Jesus, who came to help the angel against the prince of Persia
- **Cyrus King of Persia**—with whom the angel was working

The story in chronological order

1. An angel was working with King Cyrus
2. Satan was trying to disrupt the angel's work with Cyrus
3. So Jesus comes to help the angel against Satan
4. Once this is finished, God's angel is free to answer Daniel
5. But Daniel has to wait 3 weeks for this supernatural battle to finish before he can receive his answer

This was not a battle with swords or guns, but a battle of ideas—a battle for the mind.

A supernatural battle for Cyrus

What was happening in King Cyrus' mind at this point that was so critical that Jesus Himself comes to ensure that Cyrus is not overwhelmed by Satan's temptations? Again, out of everything that God could have shown us in the Bible story, why are we shown this particular supernatural battle?

The answer begins to unfold when we go back at least 100 years before Cyrus was born when God announced that he is going to call a man called Cyrus who would be His shepherd and rebuild Jerusalem—this is one of the most amazing prophecies in the Bible (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1-6, 13).

Even though Cyrus does not acknowledge God himself, God says that Cyrus will set His people free from exile and pay for everything. So when the Jewish leaders realised that the time for the exile was over, they went to Cyrus and showed him this prophecy in Isaiah.

(When I took a group to the British Museum we saw the clay cylinder where Cyrus announces that all the exiled people's can return home and he will rebuild their temples.)

Now, don't you think that Satan read this prophecy with Cyrus' named even before he was born—that Cyrus would be responsible for setting the exiles free and for rebuilding the temple so that God's presence would once again rest in Israel? Is it not unexpected that we see Satan at work through the surrounding nations to bring discouragement (Ezra 4:4-5).

It's all about timing

The decree to rebuild the temple was given in the first year of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-2). But our story begins in the third year of Cyrus ((Daniel 10:1) So what was happening in the 3rd year of Cyrus?

Ezra 3:8 says that in the second year after their arrival in Jerusalem—which appears to be the 3rd year of Cyrus—the foundation of the temple was finally laid (Ezra 3:10).

So at the time the foundations of God's temple is about to be laid in Jerusalem—which is intended to be the centre of the the revelation of God's glory and character for the whole world—Satan, the prince of Persia, is battling for the mind of King Cyrus so that Cyrus will stop the re-establishment of God's temple and God's people on the earth.

TWO APPLICATIONS

1—Sometimes my prayers are not answered immediately because there are battles happening within the supernatural realm that God is attending to first—this calls for patience

Daniel could have prayed for a few days and have reasoned as follows: what I am praying for is really important—But God is not answering. Therefore, God doesn't care about me or what I am praying about.

Or, I am not getting an answer, so evidently God does not exist. That is the conclusion that Marshall Brain is dedicating his whole life to proving.

Lesson 1—when answers do not come immediately we are called to be patient.

2—The central issue for the delay in answering Daniel's prayer was the supernatural battle over the laying of the foundation of God's temple

Again, notice that this is the only story in the Bible where God shows us the supernatural battle between angels—so why this particular story? Why is this story so important?

Today, God does not live in a stone building in the Middle East. Paul tells us that the community of faith, the Church, is God's temple where God lives (1 Corinthians 3:16). Paul also tells us that our bodies are God's temple, the place where the Holy Spirit lives (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Lesson 2—This means that when we work to lay the foundation of a new temple—

- to build up God's church
- to establish new churches
- to restore the lives of people who are currently broken as temples for the Holy Spirit

we can expect the prince of Persia, the prince of your church, to appear and fight to control the minds of those devoted to restoring broken people as God's personal dwelling place. We can expect the work of restoration of humans into temples for God to be the focus on Satan's attack.

MY RESPONSE

- **To saturate my work for God's kingdom in prayer** When people are making choices for God, my talents and abilities mean nothing against a supernatural enemy—so I must pray: 1) for divine intervention, and 2) for a renewed urgency for prayer to protect the battle for restoring people as the temple of God.
- **To be patient** Wherever necessary, when I pray, Jesus will appear and bring help. But it may take time—for the supernatural battle raging around me to subside. I am called to be patient when answers appear delayed, and not become discouraged.

1

LIFE POINT

delayed answers may be due to supernatural battles around me

2

LIFE POINT

all work for broken people is the target of Satan's anger

3

LIFE POINT

I am only as useful to God as my prayers are constant and strong

4

LIFE POINT

I need patience to wait for God—and so avoid discouragement