

Ultimate Reality

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[0 : 00] Apparently, around 90% of an iceberg is underwater, and we only really see what is above the surface. And that's why we talk about the tip of the iceberg, meaning that there's a small part of the iceberg that we can't see, but there's far more underneath the surface that we can't see. It's hidden.

And the phrase, tip of the iceberg, usually refers to a problem or an issue, something. And we can see a bit on the surface, but there's far more to it that we can't grasp just by looking.

And this image of the iceberg and the tip of the iceberg really helps us make sense, I think, of Daniel chapter 10. Because here we see there's more to reality than just what is on the surface.

There's a lot more going on that we can't see. In other words, there is a physical realm, but there is also a spiritual realm. And so in Daniel 10, what we do is we catch a glimpse, Daniel catches a glimpse of the spiritual world that's off the stage of the material, physical world.

And it's as if God pulls back the curtain for Daniel and helps Daniel understand that the conflict in the heavenly realms is taking place behind the conflict on this earth.

[1 : 22] And so what Daniel 10 does is introduce us to the final, the fourth and final vision in the book of Daniel. And it presents to us history in the future for Daniel, in the past for us.

And in Daniel chapter 12, we are able to see the conclusion of the end. And so Daniel, it's a vision. It's a vision about the future conflict for God's people under God's rule as God establishes his everlasting kingdom.

And so what we see is out of this world. That's for sure. You would have picked that up in the reading. But whilst it is out of this world, it also helps us know how to live in this world.

It equips us for life today as we see what the future holds. And so today we see a heavenly messenger with a heavenly message. And those are our two simple points.

Number one, a heavenly messenger. And then number two, a heavenly message. So first, a heavenly messenger. How does the heavenly messenger come to Daniel? Well, let's read verse one to three.

[2 : 28] In the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel, who was called Belteshazzar. This message was true and it concerned a great war.

The understanding of the message came to him in a vision. At that time, I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food. No meat or wine touched my lips.

And I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over. So Daniel dates this vision to the third year of King Cyrus's reign.

That's 537 BC, before Christ. And so Daniel, at this point, would have been in his 80s. He was an old man. And Cyrus had already issued a decree that allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem after their 70 years of exile.

And you can read about this in Ezra chapter 1, verse 1 to 4. But Daniel is one of those who hasn't returned. Because here he is, standing on the bank of the river Tigris, when he sees this vision there in verse 4.

[3 : 34] And it's a revelation about a great war, about a conflict. And it disturbed Daniel because he mourned for three weeks. He was so distressed by the vision that he didn't eat or drink as usual.

And he seems to have abandoned his grooming habits as well. You might say he let himself go. Well, why? Well, because of the suffering God's people must face.

And we'll see that in a moment. And so Daniel suffered this anguish until he saw the heavenly messenger come. Now, the vision didn't directly apply to Daniel.

And yet, it grieved him because of what he saw. Because Daniel was so committed to God. He was so committed to God's kingdom and to God's people that this vision was so brutal that it impacted Daniel emotionally and physically.

The mere prospect of what would happen in the future was so bad for God's people that Daniel struggled to cope. He was an absolute wreck. Now, before we move on, I wonder whether we ever experience distress for the sake of God's kingdom or God's people.

[4 : 50] How do we feel when God is mocked or when God's people suffer? Does it affect us in any way at all? Does it disrupt our schedules? Or are we just too busy taking care of ourselves?

Perhaps we just resign ourselves to thinking, well, that's just the way it is. God will be mocked. God's people will suffer. And that's just tough. Isn't God in control?

Well, this vision tells us that we should be concerned about what goes on in the world and what happens to God's people and God's name and honor and glory. But we should never despair.

Because what Daniel gets here is a clear vision of God and of God's rule and of God's presence. And that's what we need too. So that we don't simply drift through this world only concerned for ourselves.

Because as this vision unfolds in chapter 11, it's so grotesque and it's so frightening that Daniel has to be prepared before he sees it. That's how bad it is.

[5 : 54] Before God presses the play button, as it were, he pauses and he gets Daniel ready. Daniel has to get a better grasp of ultimate reality beyond what he can see in the human causes and effects of this world.

He has to see behind that so that it prepares him to face the future. And so he's prepared by seeing this glorious heavenly messenger.

And let's read about him in verse 4 to 6. On the 24th day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen with a belt of fine gold from euphaz round his waist.

His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches. His arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze and his voice like the sound of a multitude.

So this heavenly messenger is a majestic figure. But who is he? What is his identity, this heavenly being? Well, as with all of the apocalyptic literature in Daniel, there are various interpretations.

[7 : 09] So some suggest this could be an angel or perhaps the angel Gabriel. He's been mentioned already, chapters 8 and chapter 9. But there's no identification here in terms of this being Gabriel.

Some suggest that there might even be two figures here, one in verse 4 to 6, and then a second one from verse 10 onwards. And so there are different views.

But when you read the awesome description of this heavenly messenger, and then when you read the terror of those with Daniel, verse 7, I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision.

Those who were with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. And then when you see Daniel's own personal reaction, surely this can't be a mere angel.

I take it that this vision that Daniel sees is a vision of the pre-incarnate Christ, the Lord Jesus, before he came and entered world history.

[8 : 13] Because his appearance is glorious. He's far more radiant than the earlier descriptions of Gabriel. And he's described as a man dressed in linen.

And that's the material that would be worn by priests. And his face was like lightning. His eyes were flaming torches. His voice like the sound of a multitude.

So this is absolute purity combined with absolute power. And so it's a description that points for me to this heavenly messenger being the pre-incarnate Christ.

The Lord Jesus before his incarnation as a human being. Because his appearance here clearly echoes other appearances of God and of Jesus in the Bible.

For example, too, in Ezekiel chapter 1, this is what we read. Listen for the similarities to Daniel chapter 10. And high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man.

[9 : 15] I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up, he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire. And that from there down he looked like fire.

And brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day. So was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.

When I saw it, I fell face down. And I heard the voice of one speaking. It's Ezekiel chapter 1, what Ezekiel saw.

And then listen to what the apostle John saw of Jesus in Revelation. Revelation chapter 1. I turned round to see the voice that was speaking to me.

And when I turned and saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe, reaching down to his feet, and with a golden sash round his chest.

[10 : 15] The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace.

And his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like sun, shining in all its brilliance.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said, Do not be afraid. So these other visions, Ezekiel chapter 1, Revelation chapter 1, are so similar, aren't they, to what Daniel sees.

And Daniel also responds in the same way that Ezekiel and John do, by falling face down on the ground. And what we should notice is also how Daniel addresses this messenger.

He calls him, my Lord, verse 16, 17, and 19. And not only that, Daniel is told twice, verse 12 and verse 19, he's told, do not be afraid.

[11 : 27] And isn't that exactly what God and Jesus say to their people all the way through the Bible? Do not be afraid or fear not. And then when you add to this the touch that gave Daniel strength, there in verse 18.

And then the reassuring words about Daniel being highly esteemed, verse 12 and verse 19. It's like the well-done, good and faithful servant.

And so all of this combined convinces me anyway that it's best to understand the identity of this heavenly messenger as the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ.

And so the question is, well, why does he come to Daniel? Well, he came to Daniel with a message about the future. And so before we look at this and think about it, it's worth pausing to see the effect that the vision had on Daniel.

Because this divine encounter completely unsettled him. He was a wreck. So see verse 8. I had no strength left. My face turned deathly pale and I was helpless.

[12 : 37] Look at verse 9. As I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground. Then look at verse 10. A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees.

Verse 11. And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling. Verse 15. While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face towards the ground and was speechless.

And verse 16. I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my Lord, and I feel very weak. Verse 17. My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe.

And then verse 19. When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, speak, my Lord, since you have given me strength. And so you can see that this was quite a massive ordeal for Daniel.

It is no wonder that he collapsed in weakness and he was left speechless. He was overwhelmed with shock. He was zapped of all strength. And he was left a shivering wreck at the sight and the sound of this divine presence.

[13 : 44] And so does this have anything to do with us? Because it seems so far removed from our normal everyday experience. This kind of thing doesn't often happen. And yet it's got everything to do with us, whether we call ourselves a Christian or not.

Because what this passage reveals to us is the awesome reality of God. The living God, even if we can't see him. He is there and he encounters his people.

He encounters people like you and me. People sometimes say things like, well, I'd like to see God. If only I could see God, then I'd believe. Or even I'd like to give God a piece of my mind.

Or there are a few questions I would like to ask God and he can give me the answers. I'd like to put him on the spot. And yet it's clear from Daniel's encounter that we can never be complacent or casual with God.

And so we must never underestimate God or even domesticate God just because we can't see him. And of course we won't encounter the living God like Daniel did.

[14 : 54] But an encounter with the living God is what we need. It is what all of us need. Because when we encounter God through the Lord Jesus Christ, then it is a life-transforming experience.

And it continues to be a life-transforming experience as we listen to God's voice and as we experience his presence with us by his spirit.

And so Daniel here doesn't just get a projection of the future that he's got to learn. Instead, he gets a person. He gets a divine encounter.

He gets a clearer vision of who God is and what God is doing. Daniel doesn't get a simple explanation or a nice, neat answer for why things are the way they are.

For why suffering happens. Instead, Daniel gets something far better. He gets a vision of the glory of God and of God's strengthening presence with him.

[16 : 00] And when things are tough, that's what we all need to sustain us, isn't it? It isn't the nice, neat answers that will help us. But it's the glory of God, seeing who God really is and knowing God's presence with us that will help us get through.

Because the God who rules, the God of the book of Daniel, his presence is with his people. His presence is still with his people. He has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

And he will always be with us. And so we need to see the heavenly messenger first before we see the heavenly message. And that's our second point. The substance of the heavenly message is in chapter 11.

And it continues into chapter 12. And then it concludes. But what we're given here in chapter 10 is an insight into the nature of reality. Of how the world really is.

Because the heavenly message tells us, tells Daniel, tells us, that spiritual warfare is real. That prayer is necessary.

[17 : 11] And that God is sovereign. And so you may have thought there were just two points. But within the second point, there's some sub points. And here they are. Spiritual warfare is real. Prayer is necessary.

And God is sovereign. So first, spiritual warfare is real. So the tip of the iceberg is what is going on here. This world. The physical, material world.

What you can see. The earthly realm. But there is also a spiritual world that we can't see. A spiritual realm. And this is clear all the way through the Bible.

But the reality of it is illustrated here for us in Daniel chapter 10. Because it's part of the age-old conflict between God and Satan the devil.

It's part of this clash of kingdoms between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world that we see in Daniel. And so here, Daniel gets an insight into this spiritual warfare.

[18 : 09] There's a spiritual battle going on in the heavenly realms behind the scenes whilst there's conflict on earth. And Daniel is involved in this through prayer.

So let's read verse 12 and 13. Then he continued, Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your minds to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard.

And I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me 21 days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me. Because I was detained there with the king of Persia.

Okay, so Daniel's vision was a direct response to his prayer to God. But then there was this 21-day delay before the heavenly messenger appeared.

Now remember, Daniel mourned for three weeks, which is 21 days. And so this is presumably for Daniel a period of prayer as he sought to understand what God was showing him.

[19 : 16] So why the 21 days? Well, is it because it takes 21 days for prayer to get from here to heaven and then back again to earth? Well, no.

But it's because there's a spiritual warfare in the heavenly realms. There is a battle raging behind the scenes because Daniel is told the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me 21 days.

And so this prince is an evil but powerful spiritual being connected with Persia. And then verse 20, there's the prince of Greece.

Another powerful spiritual being connected with Greece. And then they fight. They fight the heavenly messenger, the pre-incarnate Christ, along with Michael.

Michael. And Michael, we're told, is one of the chief princes. Elsewhere in the Bible, Michael is depicted as an archangel or a commander of angels. And so there is a battle, a fight going on in the heavenly realms that can't be seen on earth.

[20 : 20] And yet Daniel's able to learn about it from the heavenly messenger. And so this is an insight for him and for us as well into the spiritual warfare that is going on.

So reflected in this conflict played out on earth, as Persia and Greece fight against the people of God, reflected in that, there is a spiritual warfare going on that can't be seen.

And I think we can best make sense of this by what Paul says in Ephesians chapter 6, where he says, Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

So Paul's saying there's the fight that takes place in the heavenly realms, and it's going on all the time. And it impacts life on earth.

[21 : 31] And so every Christian, Paul is saying, is caught up in this spiritual warfare. And that's why Paul speaks about putting on the full armor of God, because we need protection.

And then Peter, in his first letter, 1 Peter chapter 5, he warns us that our spiritual enemy, the devil, wants to devour us. He says, be alert and of sober mind.

Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. And so what we learn is that being a Christian, being one of God's people, isn't a gentle walk in the park.

It is more like a tough mother obstacle course. And that explains why the Christian life is often so hard and difficult. It's because there's an intense spiritual battle raging every moment of every day.

And so spiritual warfare is real. That's what we see here. But secondly, prayer is necessary. So in spiritual warfare, we need spiritual weapons like prayer.

[22 : 41] And we see this here with Daniel. And Paul urges us too when he says that our battle is against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. He says in Ephesians chapter 6, after he's spoken of the spiritual battle, He says, And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. So Daniel's prayers were caught up in what God was doing, which means that we are never helpless bystanders in this spiritual battle.

We have a part to play through our prayers. And so when we pray, or even when our children pray, as small as they are, they are engaging in this spiritual warfare.

And we don't know how God uses our prayers in his purposes, but the fact is he does. And that's why we should have a far greater passion in our praying.

Not because the power is in our praying, but in the God that we pray to. And have you ever wondered then why it is so hard to pray? It is because prayer is a weapon of war.

[23 : 59] And it's a weapon the devil doesn't want God's people to use. This is illustrated by C.S. Lewis in his book, The Screwtape Letters. So screwtape is a master demon.

It's all imaginary. And he gives advice on keeping a young Christian away from God. And he says the best thing where it is possible is to keep the patient from the serious intention of praying altogether.

And so Daniel 10 shows us how prayer involves us in the unseen work of God. Now, during the 16th century Scottish Reformation, John Knox had a ministry of preaching and of praying.

And it was well known, so well known, that Mary, Queen of Scots, is reputed to have said, I fear the prayers of John Knox more than all the assembled armies of Europe.

And it's because she had grasped the powerful effect of the prayers of God's people on shifting and shaping things on earth.

[25 : 03] And so prayer is necessary in the spiritual conflict. And so when we are faced with temptations, difficulties, persecution, opposition, when we're overwhelmed, feeling weak, afraid, when we're suffering, or when God's people are persecuted, or when we don't see people coming to Jesus Christ, then what can we do?

We can pray. And we must pray. And this vision wakes us up to the reality that God chooses to do his work in response to the prayers of his people.

Now, all that said, the message undergirding the whole book of Daniel is that God rules. And so that is the final thing that we must cling onto. God is sovereign. So if we look at this world, we may be tempted to think that God isn't really in control.

Or if we misunderstand prayer, we may be confused about what God is doing. And yet Daniel 10 shows us that God is sovereign. And so Daniel is going to get a detailed vision of the future.

Verse 21 says, But first I will tell you what is written in the book of truth. So God has everything recorded in the book of truth, which emphasizes God's knowledge of the future, his sovereign control of history.

[26 : 23] And so when we read here in chapter 10 about delays or resistance in the heavenly realms, we shouldn't think that the powers in spiritual warfare are somehow equal or balanced.

A bit like in Star Wars, where you have the dark side and the light side, and they're kind of equal forces that always fight against each other, one sometimes greater than the other. But it's never like that in the spiritual war, because it all takes place under God's sovereign control.

And that's what Daniel gets to see in this vision. And so perhaps he or maybe we might wonder, well, if God is in sovereign control, then why do God's people face suffering?

Which is what we'll see in chapter 11 next week. Well, I think a helpful illustration is the way that World War II ended. World War II was basically over on D-Day, when the Allied troops established a beachhead in Normandy.

And that sealed the defeat of the Germans. And they knew it. Everybody knew it. And yet it wasn't until VE Day, victory in Europe in 1945, that the war was finally over.

[27 : 35] That's when Germany eventually surrendered. Because between D-Day and VE Day, there was another battle, the Battle of the Bulge, a desperate counterattack by the German army.

And for six weeks, this battle raged back and forth, and so many lives were lost. And so the death of Jesus on the cross is a bit like D-Day.

That's when Jesus struck the death blow to the enemies of Satan, sin, and death. That's when the war was won. And so victory is assured, even though we haven't yet reached VE Day.

And so the world is enemy occupied. And so God's enemies rage on, but they are hopeless losers. And that's why God's people continue to feel the heat.

And yet God is sovereign. And this was the comfort for Daniel and for God's people then. And it still is the comfort for God's people in every age.

[28 : 41] And so this chapter is a really difficult one, but it shows us ultimate reality. It gives us a true perspective of what is really going on in this world.

And there is far more going on than just what our eyes can see. We are to read far more of human history than human causes and effects. We are to read far more into our struggles in living the Christian life than just we are a rubbish Christian.

There is a battle going on that we can't see to try and stop us living for God and following Jesus Christ. And so we need this true perspective.

So when we look at human history, when we look at the physical, material world, we know that there is also a spiritual world. There is warfare in the heavenly realms.

And the warfare is real. And because it's real, prayer is so necessary. And God is still sovereign.

[29 : 48] And so we keep going because Jesus has already won the victory through his death and resurrection. And that's why we should see Daniel's vision as part of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the King of glory. He comes to his people. He has come into human history. And one day he will come again.

And when he comes, he'll come back and he'll claim his kingdom. And that is the only hope for our world. And it's the only hope for our lives.

And so if you follow Jesus Christ, then you're on the winning side because you trust in him. And yet if you don't follow Jesus Christ, then you're on the losing side.

And this world and this life is only going to get worse. And our only hope is in what Jesus has done and what he will do in the future.

[30 : 50] So trust in him. And don't lose out by living your way. God bless. Yeah, he'll be right back.