

ARMOUR OF GOD

EPHESIANS 6:11



Courageous living requires wearing God's spiritual armour

Main Point: Today we're told of the importance of wearing a face mask to protect ourselves and others from the virus that lurks in the air.

But are we also remembering to put on God's powerful spiritual armour?

Today we'll learn from the life of Daniel that by learning from God's Word, and following God's strategy, we can be fully protected even while living in the battlefield of this turbulent world.

Intro |

What is remarkable about the strange times that we are living in, is our newly acquired readiness to accept a spiritual reality which, for many centuries, the scientific world refused to acknowledge.

Today when I say, "truly there is a battle and a war being waged in the unseen realm", we all quickly nod our heads in agreement. Barely anyone today would doubt: there is a danger, though invisible to our eyes, that is nevertheless shaping every aspect of our lives. It is influencing how we shop, how we exercise, how far we venture from our homes. It is influencing how we worship, how we talk with each other, how we fellowship with each other.

Never has the reality that the unseen realm shapes and determines what occurs in the natural, physical realm been more obvious.

While contemporary society has finally caught up with this biblical reality, some still choose to live in denial.

We've all heard the news reports of those, who when arrested for breaking health orders, justified their behaviour as due to their belief that the virus wasn't real.

Although almost everyone today recognises the reality of the viral dangers, many still refuse to acknowledge the other spiritual powers that hover all around us in the invisible realm.

As we step into Daniel's world, where the realities of the unseen realm were part of everyday life, or we listen to Jesus words in the Gospel passage, and finish with the Apostle Paul's final word to the Ephesian believers – the loud, pervading message in each is this: there is a battle raging in the unseen realm, and it is having a dramatic and powerful impact on what occurs in this world in which we live.

This reality leads us to ask some confronting questions:

- (1) Are we using the right strategy for living in this dangerous world?
- (2) Are we following the strategy that God told us years ago?
- (3) Are we wearing the personal protective wear God provided?

Point 1 | Daniel knew where to go to learn how to live in his hostile environment. He consulted the Word of God.

There is no doubt, the world in which Daniel lived had a heightened awareness of the spiritual powers of the unseen realm.

Of course, Daniel grew up with this awareness even before he was carried off to captivity. However, when he entered the King's court, to be trained in all aspects of Babylonian life – this awareness would have been intensified to the nth degree.

Daniel's entrance into Babylon meant conscription to an intense indoctrination program, designed to give him a completely new identity. He was uprooted from his home, his land, his family and planted in a palace, given a new wardrobe, fed a new diet, and was even allocated a new name – all in an attempt to brainwash him, and his friends, to forget their Hebrew heritage and religion, and adopt the Babylonian culture and religion as their own. In Daniel, and his friends' case, this meant learning how to become proficient in the fields of witchcraft and sorcery.

Talk about a personal, ethical and religious challenge! Daniel, and his friends, needed a strategy for how they were going to operate in such a strange and evil environment.

They could have become so overwhelmed with the impending doom and failure of their nation, that they discard their Jewish heritage and accept the Babylonian religious worldview of worshipping multiple gods.

Or Daniel could have become an obstinate and rebellious student – disagreeing with all his teachers and refusing to take part in lessons.

Or he could have rallied his friends together to host a protest – although that would have only got them killed.

Rather, Daniel chose a different approach.

We read, at the beginning of Chapter 9, Daniel went straight to the word from God. Specifically, he read the instruction given through the Prophet Jeremiah, which stated,

“This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says to all the captives he has exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem: Build homes, and plan to stay ... And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare.” (Jeremiah 29:4a, 7)

So, Daniel applied this principle to his life. It pervaded his entire demeanour and approach whether dealing with his peers or addressing the ruling authorities.

Daniel's new role required him to know how to operate in the unseen, supernatural realm – the realm of angelic beings, evil spirits, dream interpretation, and prophetic visions – and if Daniel was to operate in this realm, he needed the gift of discernment and wisdom. So, God granted this gift to Daniel and his friends (Daniel 1:17), so that they could be God's messengers in that environment.

But there was another instruction that God had already given to the Hebrew people. An instruction that we would do well to notice, as we too, journey through a season of crisis.

Many years earlier, God had foretold King Solomon that his people would rebel against him. God appeared to Solomon in a dream and told him,

“... at times I might shut up the heavens so that no rain falls, or command grasshoppers to devour your crops, or send plagues among you. ¹⁴ Then, if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:13-14)

This then became Daniel's strategy.

Point 2 | Daniel was obedient to God's Word and set himself to repent and pray for the restoration of his people.

Daniel applied the knowledge of what the prophets had taught him.

As he was reading God's word, **"I, Daniel, learned from reading the word of the LORD, as revealed to Jeremiah the prophet, that Jerusalem must lie desolate for seventy years. ³ So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and fasting.**

From verse 4 to verse 19 we read some of Daniel's prayer.

His prayer was a prayer of intercession for his nation. But it follows the instruction God had made earlier to King Solomon.

First, he honours God and reminds God of his covenant promises,

"O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant and keep your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and obey your commands."
(Daniel 9:4)

Then Daniel humbles himself before God. Rather than accusing his fellow Israelites of their disobedience, which caused their captivity, Daniel adopted the role of intercessor - coming before the Lord, as one who had himself rebelled against God, thus making supplication on behalf of his rebellious nation.

⁵ But we have sinned and done wrong. We have rebelled against you and scorned your commands and regulations. ⁶ We have refused to listen to your servants the prophets, who spoke on your authority to our kings and princes and ancestors and to all the people of the land." (Daniel 9:5-6)

For the rest of his prayer, Daniel pleaded with the Lord on the basis of his compassion and mercy, and his covenant promises, to forgive and restore his people.

"O Lord, hear. O Lord, forgive. O Lord, listen and act! For your own sake, do not delay, O my God, for your people and your city bear your name." (Daniel 9:19)

He is not praying for his own comfort. He is not praying for his own freedom.

He is not asking God to release him from having to serve these tyrannical leaders.

No. He is praying and confessing the sins of his nation, interceding for them so that God's covenant promises may be established on the earth.

Let's see how we apply this in our context as we live in our threatened world.

Point 3 | Daniel wore God's protective armour as he prayed for his nation. We too are called to wear God's spiritual armour as we pray for our nation.

As we move into Ephesians, we come to Paul's final word to the believers who were well-aware of the tremendous impact the unseen realm had on their daily lives.

First, like Daniel, we enter God's presence in humility. We do not come in our own strength and power. Rather, we find our strength **"in the Lord and his mighty power."** (Ephesians 6:10).

Paul reminded them of the need to **"put on all of God's armour so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil."** (Ephesians 6:11)

One of Satan's greatest strategies is causing people not to take him seriously or failing to recognise the strategies he uses to pull us off the battlefield.

Application | The church's three-fold responsibility while living in a pandemic

I'd like to leave you with some questions for your consideration.

Has not God divinely given all of us an opportunity to reflect and consider our answers?

Firstly, as we become more aware of the profound impact the unseen realm has on our physical everyday lives, are we consulting God's Word for our strategy on how to live? Is God's word the first place we run to for guidance, strength and courage?

Secondly, are we following God's instructions and promise that as God's people, called by His name, if we humble ourselves and repent, interceding for the sins of our nation, God promises to turn and heal our land?

Thirdly, have we developed a daily routine and habit of putting on God's spiritual armour, so that we are protected from the onslaught and schemes of the enemy?

This week, I have provided more reflection questions than normal. We all have more time for meditation, reflection and prayer at the moment. Let us take this time to reset our priorities, following in the pattern of Daniel, so that each of us knows how to live courageous lives during these troubling times.

Discussion and Reflection Questions

1. Can you identify some of the common attack strategies of the enemy?

In Ephesians 2:2 Paul calls the devil the "ruler of the kingdom of the air" or another translation calls him "the commander of the powers of the unseen world." That means, we live on a rebel planet controlled by the devil himself. As followers of Jesus Christ, we have been thrown into a spiritual conflict that rages all around us. In that conflict, every believer is on the front lines. All have been called to active duty.

What are some of his diabolical strategies?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unusual or repeated temptations | <input type="checkbox"/> Seductive appeals to sinful compromise |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attacks from an unexpected source | <input type="checkbox"/> Bitterness toward others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Delays that hinder us from obeying God | <input type="checkbox"/> Desires to give up on the Christian life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inducements to doubt God's Word | <input type="checkbox"/> Enticements to turn away from the means of grace |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Circumstances that produce unusual pressure upon us | <input type="checkbox"/> Excuses made for lack of spiritual growth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Temptations to sin in areas that never troubled us before | <input type="checkbox"/> Critical comments about other believers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prolonged bouts of discouragement | <input type="checkbox"/> Attempts to hide your behaviour from others. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worries that seem to consume us | |

When we face these temptations, we may be sure that the evil one and his minions has us in his sights. That's exactly the moment when we need the message of Ephesians 6:14-17. This text tells us how we should fight back against the devil:

Paul paints a picture of the Christian in complete armour, ready to go into battle with the devil. He describes six parts of the soldier's uniform:

The belt | The breastplate | The shoes | The shield | The helmet | The sword

He lists them in the exact order a soldier would put them on. The belt comes first because it covered the most vulnerable organs and held other pieces of armour in place. Each piece of armour describes a particular quality of life that the believer needs to survive the attacks of the devil.

1. The Belt of Truth

The belt held the soldier's uniform in place. *Without the belt he could not move quickly, and if he could not move, he could not fight.* The "belt of truth" refers to the truth God has revealed in his Word. When we are discouraged and under attack, we must go back to the things we know to be true.

What truths do you need to buckle tighter on your spiritual belt?

2. The Breastplate of Righteousness

The breastplate covered the vital organs of the chest, especially the heart. It was like an ancient bulletproof vest. *The righteousness Paul has in mind comes to us by virtue of our right standing with God.* Having been declared righteous (justified) by God (Romans 5:1), we now pursue righteousness in the choices we make (1 Timothy 6:11).

Is your heart securely protected with the knowledge of your righteousness in Christ?

3. The Shoes of Gospel Peace

In battle the soldier must have good shoes so they can fight without slipping. *The shoes give him a solid foundation.* When Paul speaks of the "gospel of peace," he means that the gospel itself is the only true source of peace. Because of Jesus Christ, we now have peace *with* God (Romans 5:1) and we have the peace *of* God (Philippians 4:7).

What needs to happen to enjoy peace with God and other Christians?

4. The Shield of Faith

The shield of faith describes what we might call dependent living. *It means calling on the Lord for help in the time of trouble.* Dependent living is the opposite of doing it your own way.

What fiery darts is the devil (or his cohort) shooting at you?

5. The Helmet of Salvation

The helmet protects the soldier's head. *Foolish is the soldier who goes into battle without their helmet.* They won't last long when the enemy begins firing from the other side. The helmet of salvation speaks of the assurance of salvation.

Do you have a calm confidence of your salvation?

6. The Sword of the Spirit

Finally, the Bible tells us to take up the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. That's the only weapon the soldier of Christ carries. All the other armour is meant to protect them. The Word of God cuts like a double-edged sword, laying everything bare so that nothing is hidden (Hebrews 4:12-13). That's why, when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, he responded to the devil by quoting Scripture (Luke 4:1-13). *Nothing defeats the devil like the Word of God.* Our clever arguments mean nothing to him.

Are you holding up your sword, or is it lying on the table somewhere?

Now we can understand verse 13 in a clear light: **"Put on every piece of God's armour so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm"** (NLT).

No believer is safe who faces Satan in his own strength. No believer is more secure than the one who goes into battle wearing the whole armour of God.

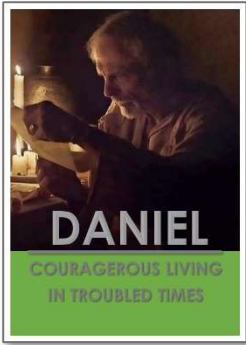
We are to fight *in* the name of Jesus.

We are to fight *with* the name of Jesus.

We are to fight *for* the name of Jesus.

Christ is our armour!

Jesus fights with us and through us and for us so that we are not left alone on the battlefield. We must still go into battle but God provides the armour. He gives us whatever we need whenever we need it so that no believer ever need be defeated by the devil. Stand and fight, child of God. The Lord is on your side. **Amen.**



Daniel Devotional:

The Daniel devotional provided last week continues this week. I encourage you to sit down daily with the Lord and meditate on the entire book of Daniel. Not only was Daniel a wonderful example of an effective pray-er, he also shows us how to wait for God's timetable, trusting that God will bring his plans and purposes to fulfilment at the right time.