

§ 8. Doctrine of Creation

Lecture 20

The Work of Angels

We have been thinking about angels and demons. Last time we looked at the nature of these angelic beings. Today we want to say something more about the work of angels – what do they do?

First of all, *angels seem to guide the destiny of nations*. In the book of Daniel, it appears that there are angels which are peculiarly linked to various nations and which influence those nations. In Daniel 10:13-20, the angel speaks to Daniel as follows:

“The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, so I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia and came to make you understand what is to befall your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come.” When he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and was dumb. And behold, one in the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke. I said to him who stood before me, “O my lord, by reason of the vision pains have come upon me, and I retain no strength. How can my lord's servant talk with my lord? For now no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me.” Again one having the appearance of a man touched me and strengthened me. And he said, “O man greatly beloved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage.” And when he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, “Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.” Then he said, “Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I am through with him, lo, the prince of Greece will come.”

So here you have angelic beings mentioned in connection with three nations. You have the prince of Persia, you have the angel associated with Israel, and then you have the prince of Greece who is going to do battle with the angel of Israel. So it would seem that in these unseen realms these angelic beings have special connections with various nations and actually do battle with one another.

Secondly, *angels minister to the people of God*. Hebrews 1:14, which we've read before, says, “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?” This is a verse that is about us; that is to say, the church. Angels are ministering spirits who are sent to serve the people of God. We find an illustration of this role in 1 Kings 19:5-8. This is the story of Elijah's flight. It says,

And he lay down and slept under a broom tree; and behold, an angel touched him, and said to him, “Arise and eat.” And he looked, and behold, there was at his head

a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came again a second time, and touched him, and said, “Arise and eat, else the journey will be too great for you.” And he arose, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

Here the angel ministers to Elijah in the very practical way of providing him with food and drink. We have the same thing in the life of Jesus in Matthew 4:11. This is the incident that comes at the end of Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness after he has fasted for forty days and forty nights. In Matthew 4:11 it says, “The devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.” The word “ministered” here is typically used to mean “to serve food and drink.” It is what a servant does at tables. So, in the same way that Elijah was ministered to by the angel, so Jesus, having fasted for forty days and forty nights and being tempted by the devil, is ministered to by angels in the provision of food and drink.

A different sort of ministration is in view in Luke 22:43. Here is the story of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane where an angel ministers to him. Luke 22:43 might not be in the text of some of your Bibles, but it may be in the footnote to your text. This verse appears in very ancient manuscripts which are very likely reliable and so this verse should actually be part of the text of the Gospel of Luke. It says in Luke 22:43,

And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Here you have again the angel ministering to Jesus in the time of his greatest need in the Garden as he was facing the cross. The angel strengthens him for this purpose.

In Psalm 91:9-12 we have a general promise in this regard:

Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your habitation, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.

Here angels are described as protecting the people of God, perhaps from spiritual warfare with invisible demons that would seek to do us harm. We have no idea of the protection that angels may afford us in this sort of invisible spiritual warfare.

Thirdly, *angels execute God’s justice*. We have an illustration of this work of angels in 2 Kings 19:35: “And that night the angel of the LORD went forth, and slew a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.” Here God metes out his judgment upon the

enemies of Israel, but he does so not immediately but rather through the process of a destroying angel.

In the New Testament, you have an example of this role of angels in Acts 12:23. This is a passage that describes the death of Herod. Acts 12:21-23 says,

On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and made an oration to them. And the people shouted, “The voice of a god, and not of man!” Immediately an angel of the Lord smote him, because he did not give God the glory; and he was eaten by worms and died.

This is another example of God’s justice being meted out upon the enemies of God’s people by means of an angel.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-8 speaks of the final judgment which will also involve angels. Paul is speaking here of the righteous judgment of God, and he says that God will

grant rest with us to you who are afflicted, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Here the angels will be involved in the second coming of Christ and in his meting out judgment upon those who do not believe the Gospel and who reject God.

Finally, Revelation 16:1 says, “Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, ‘Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.’” Then the passage goes on to describe how the first angel, and then the second angel, and then the third angel each went out and poured out the bowls of God’s wrath upon the Earth which are symbolic of God’s judgment upon the Earth. So the angels are instruments of God’s justice and judgment upon unbelief.

Fourthly, *angels will both gather Christians and accompany Christians at the second coming of Christ*. The angels will gather living Christians and also accompany those Christians who are deceased and who are with the Lord at the time of Christ’s return. Look, for example, at Matthew 24:29-31:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Here at the return of Christ – his second coming – his angels will go out and gather all of the living Christians at that time into the new Kingdom which Christ is bringing.

These angels who accompany Christ when he comes again will also accompany the souls of the dead in Christ to be reunited with their resurrection bodies. Matthew 25:31 says, “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.” So this verse describes the angels who will accompany Christ at the time of his return to inaugurate his Kingdom.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17, Paul gives an extended disquisition on this subject. Paul writes,

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord.

Notice here that the angels do more than just gather the elect who are living at the time of Christ’s return, but they also accompany the souls of the dead in Christ. Paul says that those who have died in Christ – those who have fallen asleep – will precede us who are alive at the time of Christ’s return in being gathered into the Kingdom with Christ. The Lord will come with the archangel’s call and with the souls of the dead in Christ, and then those who are alive shall be transformed and ushered into the Kingdom. Similarly, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8, to read this verse again, says that God will

grant rest with us to you who are afflicted, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

This verse is simply confirmation of the involvement of angels at the time of the second coming of Christ – in this case in meting out God’s judgment upon unbelief.

So at the time of the second coming, angels will accompany the dead in Christ as their souls are reunited with their resurrection bodies. And then the angels will gather the living Christians from the corners of the Earth, and similarly they will be transformed into their resurrection bodies. And so we shall always be with the Lord.

This is some of the work of angels in the Bible.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Angels were also givers of the law. Did you go over that?

Dr. Craig: I did not, but there are a couple of passages in the New Testament where Paul talks about the message delivered by angels. The law. The author of Hebrews says the same. That's true. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list. But that would be another role in which angels were involved in the Old Testament – to give the law.

Student: That's interesting because it's not clear in the Old Testament but it is mentioned in the New Testament.

Dr. Craig: Yes, that's the oddity, isn't it? There was evidently a tradition that arose that the New Testament writers were aware of that isn't recorded in the actual narratives of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai.

END DISCUSSION

Let's take a look at the work of two very special angels – the only two who serve the Lord that are actually named in the Bible, namely Michael and Gabriel. It just occurred to me that those are the names of two of our key employees with Reasonable Faith – our executive director and social media director Michael and Gabriel! So we've got namesakes of angels working with Reasonable Faith. Later we'll look at the figure of Satan and try to understand him and the demons in relation to angelic beings, but we want to look here at these two persons of Michael and Gabriel.

Out of all of the myriads of angelic hosts that serve the Lord, only two are actually named in the scripture: Michael and Gabriel. They are named several times in Scripture, both in the Old Testament and then again in the New Testament.

Let's take a look first at the angel Michael who is mentioned first in the book of Daniel – Daniel 10:13-20. We've already looked at this passage. In Daniel 10:13, Daniel receives a revelation from an angel who comes to him and reports, “The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, so I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia.” Here Michael is identified as one of the chief princes of the angels – one who is extremely powerful and who is therefore able to do battle with the prince of Persia who had stymied the angelic messenger who had been sent to Daniel. Then in Daniel 10:21 he's told, “But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince.” Here in Daniel 10:21 Michael is mentioned for a second time as the prince who is associated with Daniel and presumably with his people. He is referred to as “your prince” in speaking to Daniel. Then in Daniel 12:1-2 Michael is mentioned again:

At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people.
And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a

nation till that time; but at that time your people shall be delivered, every one whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Here Michael is explicitly associated with the kingdom of Israel. He is the prince who has charge of God's people, Israel. And he is involved with the final resurrection of the dead. So already in the Old Testament Michael is known as one of the chief of the angelic beings. He's mentioned again, as I've indicated in previous lessons, in the New Testament in Jude 9. This is the story of Michael's contending with Satan. It says,

But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you."

Remember that in the book of Daniel Michael is referred to as one of the chief princes of the angels. Here he is referred to as an archangel indicating his higher rank and authority. His tremendous power is evident in that he is able to contend with Satan himself in the ninth verse of the book of Jude.

Michael's status as a warrior is also evident in Revelation 12:7-8:

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.

This passage also refers to the archangel Michael warring against Satan and of Satan's being cast out of heaven.

These are the biblical passages that specifically mention Michael.

The other angel that is mentioned specifically is the angel named Gabriel. He also appears in the book of Daniel in Daniel 8:16-17. We read,

And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the U'lai, and it called, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision." So he came near where I stood; and when he came, I was frightened and fell upon my face. But he said to me, "Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end."

Here Daniel has a vision of an angelic person that is identified as Gabriel. This angel also appears again in the next chapter in Daniel – Daniel 9:20-22 – where Daniel recounts:

While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy hill of my God; while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice.

He came and he said to me, “O Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding.

Here Gabriel appears to Daniel in some sort of human form. He is called “the man” Gabriel. But the term “in flight” indicates that we are talking about an angelic being and not a mere human being.

This same angel named Gabriel again appears in the New Testament in the Gospel of Luke in the story of the annunciation. He announces both the birth of John the Baptist and then also of Jesus himself. Luke 1:19 is the first of these stories. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, has a vision, and he says to the angel in verse 18, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” *How can we have a child?* he wants to know. Then in Luke 1:19-20,

And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.”

Here again we see, as in the case of Michael, the very exalted status of this angel. Gabriel is described here as one who stands in the very presence of God.

So evidently both Michael (who is an archangel and one of the chief princes) and Gabriel are angels who have very high status and rank before God.

Then in Luke 1:26-27 we read that, “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.” And then you have the story of the annunciation of the birth of Christ.

So it's quite remarkable, I think, that we have these two angels both mentioned by name in the book of Daniel carrying out various functions and then again they reappear in the New Testament. If we look at the roles that they play, it would seem that Michael is the warrior (the one who does battle), whereas Gabriel seems to be the messenger (he is not the one engaged in warfare as Michael is, but the one in communicating wisdom and understanding to God's people).

These are the only references to Michael and Gabriel in the Bible, or to any other angel by name. But at least the identity of these two extremely exalted angels is made known to us in Scripture.

Next time we will take up the subject of Satan and his demons.¹