

Christ and the Angels

The Book of Hebrews

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Bible Text: Isaiah 6:1-13, Acts 7:44-53
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In spite of those readings not actually taking us to Hebrews 1, that is actually where we are again this evening and, well, in as short a time as we can deal with the great subject that is before us, that subject being "Christ and the Angels." Christ and the angels, and that's going to take us at least portions of verses 4 to 14 as we find that in Hebrews 1.

Now the first four verses have, if you will, established the divinity of Christ, that subject which now will give flavor to all the arguments that the writer to this group of Jewish background believers, believers who are risking falling away from grace, who are beginning to show worrying signs of apostasy, and the letter mixes together strong warnings but also warm encouragements, and in the midst of it deals emphatically with the alternatives that they're entertaining, namely going back to the old covenant ways and sacrifices and the Aaronic priesthood. And so by establishing at the beginning the divinity of Christ, showing it really beyond a shadow of doubt, that will actually in its way answer all of the further issues, the more detailed issues that the writer is going to address as he proceeds.

If you will, the letter works out the implications of these opening verses of Hebrews 1, and we can see as we move into somewhat more of a detailed treatment that the writer is now going to bring to bear upon what he's saying here, that verse 4 tells us that it speaks here still of our Lord "having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." That name that he has received is that name of being Son, that is the Son. "For to which of the angels did He ever say: 'You are My Son?'" And that is his most excellent name, and as the writer now begins to look at the subject of angels and contrast that with the subject still continuing of our Lord Jesus Christ and his divinity, necessarily our Lord having the name that is more excellent than they as the Son of God, has a ministry that is more excellent than they and necessarily so, and this is what he's going to be at pains to try to describe. And in doing that, he actually renders service for us, for all believers, in while contrasting the work and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ with the work and ministry of angels, he actually lays out for us something of the ministry of angels.

And so that's the subject that we're going to attempt to look at this evening because there are lots of Scriptures we're going to be turning up, we'll be turning the pages of the Bible

a fair bit, I think, but there are various references. They tell us everything, everything we might want to know, but they tell us something and enough to actually be a great encouragement to us who are Christians. But of course, in the context that he's writing, he is showing that however great they are and however beneficial their ministry is, and it is, they're not as great as our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, my first heading and it's a question: who are the angels? Who are the angels? Well, we can't give a definition as would be I'm sure here to all our satisfaction but we must say this, they're spirit beings. They are spirit beings and that immediately takes us into a realm where we are completely out of our depth, that we have the Holy Spirit indwelling us, that we are spiritual beings, but we have bodies and we are subject to the laws of gravity and we need to eat, well, we need to do various things that come with being human. Well, angels are not subject to that. They do not have a body. They do not in that way necessarily inhabit a body. They can, which we'll see, manifest themselves in a body but that is something of an alien form that they take on for our sakes, but really they are spirit beings, an existence, a dimension of existence which doesn't fit in within the parameters of our natural world, the world that we see and touch and taste and in those various ways there can respond to and interact with. No, that's not their world at all, and though they manifest themselves and can in the body, that is not their natural state of being. They are spirit beings and so they defy the laws of chemistry and physics. They are beyond descriptions which a scientist could apply to them. Their dimension doesn't fit within what we call material existence. Their sphere of existence is totally totally different, but for all the fact of being different, they're absolutely real. They are as real as anything that we can touch, anything we can taste, anything that belongs to the dimensions of our material world.

So they have a reality and when did they come into being? Well, we think they came into being either before or at creation, so somewhere within all the events of Genesis 1. At Psalm 104:4 we learn that they are created from the fact that we are told there, "Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire." Ah, God created them, God made them, and it lay well within his power to do such a thing, to make such beings as this for they very much share in his habitation. That is where they dwell. That's our next point there, they have their habitation and as befits beings that are spirit beings, they dwell in the heavenlies not in a such in which we may survey the sky or think that we can see some angels there up in the night sky and the firmament, likely a shooting star, if you will, all that in a clear blue sky like we had today, for instance, you might be able to see an angel winging his way across the firmament. Well, no, not in that regard. Again, heaven a real place, heaven an existing place, but outside of our dimension. Somehow it has its existence without relying upon all of the various things that our material existence relies upon, all that the cosmos above relies upon, the stars and the heavenly bodies which have their own patterns of movements, laws of gravity, and such things.

Well, angels dwell with God in the heavenlies. In Jude 6, a short letter which contains so much, sometimes tantalizing information, and here speaking of other angels that forsook their place but we learn where their habitation is. "And the angels who did not keep," in verse 6 of Jude, "the angels did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode,

He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day." Well, now that is interesting because that is telling us that angels, that is, their natural habitation there in the presence of God in the heavenlies, nevertheless, there were those that rebelled and those that lost their firm footing, left their own abode. They did not keep their proper domain and this would be seen. This are great matters, aren't they, here for us to try to get our minds around but Satan leading that charge, as it were, against God's rule and administration and all his efforts that we've been looking at with our Seeker's Club children at the beginning of the world, inhabiting the snake and deceiving Eve and bringing Adam there to transgress.

So we can see that there is a different branch of angelic beings, a branch that are in rebellion and these, of course, we would call demons. We believe equally in the existence of demons. How that puts us, doesn't it, at variance there with a world of unbelief. Don't be fooled at all about all the Halloween goings on at the moment and how much of that we're wearied with seeing day-in, day-out at the present, but that is not a sign people believe these things, it's a sign they don't believe in any of it, that they can make sport of it, to make light of it, and that it's a bit of a joke and a bit of a celebration, a time to be a bit naughty and that sort of thing. It doesn't show they believe in these things, it shows the opposite, they neither fear God nor the devil and that is a sad indictment of our present age.

But there are such events that are well beyond our comprehension. Daniel 10 gives us some indication of a battle that Daniel and that most cryptic of prophecies leads us to try to envisage as best we can. So Daniel 10:12 and 13 and in verse 20, well, what do we learn there? Well, things again well beyond us. The angel comes to him and says, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia." Those not be kings in terms of an earthly throne, this is some angelic being, this is some angelic battle, if you will, and we are left here somewhat out of our depth in trying to comprehend it. In verse 20 of Daniel 10, he goes on to say, "Do you know why I have come to you? And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come."

Now this leads us to suppose that there are indeed some things happening well out of our sight, well beyond our power to comprehend but nevertheless happening and we do well just to at least somewhere in our thinking factor this in. And these are not jokes. The angel didn't come to Daniel there all dressed up in some fancy garb or Halloween costume and all the rest of it and saying it's an absolute laugh. No, it was a fight. It was a battle and it was a battle of some significance and Daniel was given some insight into it.

So if we set aside the demons and they're held now, aren't they, for everlasting damnation and thinking more happily of the angels that are in the presence of God for that is where they are, and we would learn of them that there are ranks of angels. Once more we count the authorities on this, but we can at least deduce from the Scripture that there are ranks

of angels, different kinds of angels. The Archangel Michael stands there and he was mentioned, of course, in that prophecy just now. There are the seraphim and we read of them in the reading we had, first of all, in Isaiah and there in chapter 6. We learn of them in verses 1 to 3. "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!'" Now that is very elevated and exalted angels given a special designation there of seraphim, very high rank we might well imagine.

But there are others and some that are called cherubim. We'll find these mentioned there right at the beginning in the history of our world, Genesis 3:24. Adam and Eve had been driven out of the garden following their disobedience and we learn in Genesis 3:24, "So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life." These are also, we think, correlated with at the end, the last book of the Bible in Revelation 4:6 and following. What do we read there? We read this, "Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!'" Of course, it's reminiscent of what we read in Isaiah 6. Well, some might reckon that those are cherubim. Well, we can't be experts on it but certainly some angelic beings of some considerable stature.

And we learn of some various ranks and orders of angelic host in Ephesians 1 and there in verses 20 and 21 where we're told of their mighty power, we read this verse often, don't we, "which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come." Well, principalities, powers, mights, and dominions, different sort of rankings of angelic being with different roles, different works that they are given to do.

And some had names. We mentioned Michael but famously as we begin to approach the clock change, we begin to think very much of Christmas being less than two months away. Well, we have Gabriel, a named angel. Gabriel. He's in the Old Testament as well, in fact, he's very very active in the New Testament.

So who are these angels? Well, they're spirit beings with different orders and different ranks in the presence of God and what do they do? Well, they serve and minister. They serve and minister, they minister to God. They are speaking forth, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Hosts."

Well, they serve mankind. They serve us. They serve the church and we learn of this and, again, these are obvious examples here but Gabriel and his considerable activity in the Christmas narrative, visiting, well, visiting Zechariah, tell him, not many believed it but to tell him nevertheless that his wife Elizabeth who had been barren until that time, well advanced in age, was going to have a son and he was going to be remarkable, he was going to go before the face of the Lord to prepare his way, John the Baptist, of course. And visits Mary to tell her that she is going to be with child though she knows not a man, it's the power of the Almighty overshadowing her, the Spirit of God will come upon her and so that which is conceived in her will be called the holy one of Israel.

Then to the shepherds out in the field at night, one angel but then a host of angels go to announce something extremely significant. So in Luke 2:8 and through to 14. We know these verses, I'm sure. "Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!'" Well, it's hard to imagine an announcement of more significance anywhere else in the Bible than that which these angels brought to those shepherds most famously on this particular occasion here.

But as well as taking messages to people or all mankind in this case, well, they take messages to God's people sometimes very individually. Again we don't have to look too far in the whole narrative that surrounds the Incarnation and we find angels very much at work in Matthew's gospel and in all the account that he gives of our Savior coming into the world. So Matthew 1 and there in verse 20 and we learn, "[Joseph] while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.'" Again if we turn to chapter 2 once more in verse 13 after they had gone to, having to go to Egypt, "Now when they had departed," the wise men, that is, "behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, 'Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.'"

And that correlates with what we have in Hebrews 1 and in verse 14 of the angels and the writer is putting a question here that's unanswerable because what he is stating is actually a fact which they can barely argue against. "Are they not," angels, "all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" And with what we were seeing there in the Christmas narrative and the birth of our Savior, well, we can see very much that that is what they're doing for those who will inherit salvation, their ministry being words and very significant words whether privately to Joseph or indeed to the shepherds be voiced further and spoken to all.

But while they are doing this, we also know that angels minister judgments, judgments upon the enemies of the Lord's people and we can turn up a mighty instance of this in Genesis and there in chapter 19, and a significant event that this is that we have recorded for us here in Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 and we read there in verse 1, "Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground." Well, they had come manifesting human bodies here, remarkable. And Lot takes them to be strangers and insists that they should not stay outside but should come in and, of course, they're bringing warning of what will follow. And when there is people that turn up outside and demand to have these men sent out to them, and the angels in verse 9 of chapter 19 of Genesis say this, "And they said, 'Stand back!' Then they said, 'This one came in to stay here,'" people outside saying of Lot, "'and he keeps acting as a judge; now we will deal worse with you than with them.'" So they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near to break down the door. But the men," these are the angels, "reached out their hands and pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. And they struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they became weary trying to find the door." And we know they announced further judgment. That was an instant judgment and those further to come when fire and brimstone rained down upon that particular city.

And elsewhere too, there are judgments that they bring in 2 Kings, an instance of that in chapter 19 where we have the arrogant Assyrian army camped out against Jerusalem and looking to bring the people there into exile, wanting to destroy the city and taunting the people their trust in the Lord. Well, we know perhaps what the outcome of that is. 2 Kings 19 and there in verse 35, "And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses--all dead." Well, the angel of the Lord there coming to inflict judgment.

So we can see they have a varied role but preserving and protecting the Lord's people whether it's Lot or whether it was the city of Jerusalem from the hand of the Assyrian army under the mighty king Sennacherib. They can inflict their judgments as well as bringing messages of comfort from heaven, guidance and instruction particularly surrounding the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. But there's another instance furthermore and that is that angels were present at the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, and this is perhaps very significant for the point of view of Hebrews 1. Remember the people are beginning to drift back towards Sinai thinking that this was where their salvation lay, and the writer is going to have to show them that actually they're placing themselves back under the law and the law brings them no hope, it condemns them. But the fact that angels were present at Sinai might explain why it is that seemingly this group of believers were beginning to drift into angel worship for we learn, for instance in Deuteronomy 33:1-2 this, quite a few texts for us to digest tonight but Deuteronomy 33:1-2, "Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. And he said: 'The LORD came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, And He came with ten thousands of saints; From His right hand Came a fiery law for them.'" And it's thought when it speaks there of these saints,

it's talking of angels, that angels were involved in that particular ministry, the giving of the law out Mount Sinai.

Now we further see that in the second of our passages we read this evening Stephen's mighty address to the Sanhedrin which had we read on we would have seen led to his death, but just at the end of that reading we had in Acts 7 and there in verse 53 we read, "who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it." It is that receiving the law by the direction of angels.

And Paul also alludes to this in Galatians 3 and there in verse 19, "What purpose then does the law serve?" He answers, "It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator." We know the mediator ultimately, of course, is God and acting for himself in that way, but also the ministry there of angels.

So we can see that this is some ministry that they perform and though we're out of our depth to fully understand all of the angelic beings and their work, the Scripture very seriously, very soberly describes their ministry and those famous interventions that they made, perhaps others that we are not so familiar with. Well, who are the angels? Well, we've tried as best we can to answer some of that.

The second heading is this: angels are on our side. Angels are on our side. We're discounting here the demons, they certainly are not, but angels are, they are ministering spirits sent to serve those who are going to inherit eternal life, true believers, Christians. Their ministry under God is directed to that end of actually assisting and helping the people of God.

Now they are not to be worshiped and this is something that came through very forcibly right in the last chapter of the last book of the Bible in Revelation and there in chapter 22 where John was much moved in his heart to actually worship the angel that was speaking to him but he's warned in verses 8 and 9 this of Revelation 22:8-9, "Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, 'See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.'" So the angels are on our side but they're not to be worshiped, they are not to be thought of in that category and so above us in that way though they are, have a glory that we certainly do not have, but they're not to be worshiped. We are to worship God, worship God only.

Well, nevertheless, to perhaps think a little more often about the help that they are giving to believers, to you and to me perhaps, and outside of where we might fully understand their ministry but a ministry nonetheless. It helps that we might receive encouragements that may have befallen us, crossed our path, deliverances maybe thinking of it in that way where we might have felt ourselves that to be involved in an accident and suddenly we weren't, and who can say what ministry the angels might have been performing for our sakes there. As an interesting episode in 2 Kings 6 and in the life of Elisha, which I

imagine we'll come to at some point or other in our young people's services as we proceed through the life of Elijah and now Elisha. So 2 Kings 6 and the surrounding of the place where they were by the Assyrian army, mighty and strong army that it was. In verse 15 to 17 we read the following, the servant and Elisha, greatly exercised by what he was seeing with all these people around them and threatening them so we read in verse 15 of 2 Kings 6, "And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, 'Alas, my master! What shall we do?' So he answered, 'Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' And Elisha prayed, and said, 'LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." So we see angels protecting, watching over this great prophet of God.

And well, one hears many stories out and about and discounts a fair few of them as we said, but I know a servant of God in India and this man, well, he wasn't a servant of God then, he was actually looking to assassinate a Christian but he was deterred from doing it because of the two kind of heavy minders that were with that Christian. But he was on his own. There was nobody there and this person who would be assassinated would reckon that he probably saw angels protecting for whatever reason there in God's purposes this man from this rather nasty intervention. And that man who planned to be an assassin actually became a great evangelist and preached throughout Tamil Nadu to some considerable effects.

Well, who is not to say that you and I have not been protected on occasion by angels? Unbelieving people saw us surrounded with chariots of fire as Elisha was? And that this has been a blessing that we know nothing of? We didn't see it, our eyes weren't open to it and perhaps will only when we get to glory will we see that visible but present to protect and even deliver Christians from death.

Well, my final heading and briefly: angels do not save us. Angels do not save us. I'm sure we're not liable to commit that particular mistake or to think that that should be the case at all, but that really is why the writer here is having to place the ministry of Christ in its elevated state and his better name more excellent than they and his ministry more excellent than they and to place the angels in subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ because the people were beginning to play with the idea that the angelic beings played a role, that they were part of redemption, that you needed their help, their ministry as though they were like guardian angels and you could pray to them and they would sort of bring you into the presence of God. Well, there were a group of people there and you could impress your friends with, they were Gnostics, spelled with a "G" but Gnostics who had some very high-faluting ideas about the sort of realm of the heavenlies, incredibly complex. I could weary you will all of the details but there was a group led by a man called Valentinus who lived between about 100-160 AD and gave names to the Valentinians who followed him. Incredibly complex ideas of levels of angelic beings and really lumped together in that same category our Lord and the Holy Spirit. Now you have to sort of carry through in all these angelic levels and you get higher knowledge. That's the

gnosis, it means knowledge, and you get a clearer picture and revelation and light that comes.

Well, this is all weird stuff and completely unscriptural stuff and the people of this day were beginning to touch that kind of material, these kinds of teachings, so the Lord Jesus Christ was being relegated and his glory eclipsed and angels were now being inserted in place. And so very much all that Christ at that particular kind of economy did was to function as a revealer of knowledge. Not a Savior, not a Redeemer but a bringer of knowledge, enlightenment to the mind, a fresh sort of spiritual understanding which brought you, according to these teachers, nearer to God. Well, all these powerful things at work there to rob our Lord of his divinity and status, his office as our Savior and so often built around a serious misdiagnosis of the human condition. That is sin, not lack of knowledge. It is sin. You can't have a flash of some inspiration, we need a Savior to save us from our sin and good things then will follow.

So we are always to be on the watch any number of popular writers out there who claim to be in contact with angels and bringing words of comfort and the rest. Well, believe them not. They are false things, false ideas. We've mentioned already that there are demons, that there are enemies of God, enemies of true angels fighting, warring and which would rob Christ of his divinity, rob him of his role as our Savior and send men and women to believe in fiction and delusion and things which will not bring them to glory.

So we can see something of the ministry here of angels. We've barely touched the surface on it. We barely would know how to. Angelology, that's the fancy word for this, the study of angels. Well, they're here in Scripture and we're beholding to Scripture to study it and to try to understand as best we can that role of angels, and somewhere within our thanksgiving to God, even though we may not know the precise reasons or helps that we've received, we nevertheless are to thank God for the ministry of angels. Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? And the answer to that question mostly obviously is, yes. Nothing has changed since he wrote those things so we are on strong ground to assume that you and I also have benefited from the ministry of angels.