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Introduction

I'm glad we get to talk about angels again. This is one of my favorite topics. Charles Spurgeon once told his congregation, "I do not know how to explain it; I cannot tell how it is, but I believe angels have a great deal to do with the business of this world."¹ And I believe he was absolutely correct. Now, here's the problem - because we cannot usually see angels, we tend to disregard their critically important role on earth - unless of course we are living by faith. But in earlier chapters we saw that angels play a huge role in the everyday providence of God.

I. What's an angel got to do with the Gospel?

And these verses insist that angels play a huge role in missions. Verse 6 says, "And I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an eternal gospel to be proclaimed to those who reside on the earth..." And we will see that there are five more angels in this chapter who prepare men for the Gospel. Why are so many commentaries either skeptical that this is a real angel (they make him a metaphor for a missions movement or something similar) or they are skeptical that this angel holds the good news of the Gospel? Of course, not all commentators are skeptical. There are many commentaries who have clearly pointed out that grammatically you can't do that. These angels somehow have something to do with the Gospel proclamation.

A. Doesn't Romans 10:14-15 preclude angels from preaching the gospel?

Well, people are nervous about an angel speaking anything related to the Gospel because they mistakenly think that it violates the truth of Romans 10:14-15. Piper and many others have pointed out that the Gospel must come from human preachers. And I agree; it must. There is an order in these verses. The human missionaries of verses 1-5 must be active or missions

¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Sermons* volume 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 191.

won't happen. But verses 6 and following show that angels must be active or missions won't happen. And then in verses 14-16 we see that Christ must be involved in harvesting new converts or missions won't happen. We can't change a heart; only He can. So it is not either/or. All must be involved.

So there is an order and a flow in this chapter. But let me read you the verses in Romans 10 that make people skeptical that angels can be involved in any aspect of the proclamation of the Gospel. It's Romans 10:14-15. It says,

Rom. 10:14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? Rom. 10:15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings ["glad tidings" is the gospel; so "who bring glad tidings" or the gospel] of good things!"

The key phrase that they look at is, "how shall they hear without a preacher?" And the grammar requires the answer to be that they can't hear without a preacher. Their argument is that only humans can bring the Gospel. As one commentator worded it,

The preaching of the Gospel is committed to men, not angels. This Gospel is communicated by men.²

Now, I happen to agree with them. But here is the potential problem: Look at what the text clearly says: "And I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven [so this is not just any messenger; this is a messenger that can fly in midheaven], having an eternal gospel to be proclaimed to those who reside on the earth..." So how do we reconcile these two strains of thinking?

I would say that while it is true that angels seem to consistently leave the full message of the Gospel to humans to preach, they still seem to be involved in directing people (either verbally or non-verbally) to the Gospel that is being brought by others. For example, at the birth of Jesus, angels appeared to the shepherds in the field, and in the Greek, they are said to bear glad tidings (which is the same word for gospel). It says,

Luke 2:8 ¶ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Luke 2:9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Luke 2:10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy [or literally, I proclaim a Gospel of great joy] which will be to all people. Luke 2:11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." Luke 2:13 ¶ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: Luke 2:14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

² Vic Reasoner, [A Fundamental Wesleyan Commentary on Revelation](#) (Evansville, IN: Fundamental Wesleyan Publishers, 2005), p. 383.

I find it interesting that these angels did not communicate the specific plan of salvation. They just communicated that the Savior was born and that if they would travel to Joseph and Mary they could hear for themselves what had happened. Likewise, Gabriel brings the Gospel (or what the New King James renders as "glad tidings") to Zacharias in Luke 1:19. The whole story again gives information that Zacharias can look forward to. But He was responsible to look at the Scripture message Himself.

So though the fullest message of the good news is found in the Scripture alone, the angel at least gives the good news that the good news is at hand. Piper is rightly skeptical of any reports of visions or angelic visitations that purport to bypass man and that purport to give the full gospel through a vision or through an angel alone. I too am skeptical of that. That would not be the Scriptural pattern.

But I find it interesting that the vast majority of stories that I hear coming out of third world countries, and especially Muslim nations, are stories of a person being told by an angel to find a Bible and read it, or to go to a given address and a person at that address will tell them how to find peace with Jesus, or to watch for a missionary who would be coming through the area and to listen to his message. Just like the angelic message in these verses, those angels give enough to convict, to motivate, and to direct people to the Gospel, but they do not give the plan of salvation itself; that seems to be left to the humans.

And this is the paradigm that you see elsewhere in the book of Acts. Angels paved the way for the message. For example, in Acts 10, an angel appears to Cornelius and tells him,

"Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do." (vv. 4-6)

The angel didn't give the way of salvation; he lets Peter do that, but he directs Cornelius to Peter. So the angel does indeed give good news in a sense, but it is only the preparatory side of the Gospel. Likewise in Acts 8 Philip is sent by an angel to a specific place in order to preach the Gospel to the Ethiopian Eunuch. The angel is involved in missions, but it is Philip who must preach the way of salvation. Likewise in Acts 12 an angel wakes Peter up, frees him from prison, and tells him to go back to his Gospel ministry. The angel doesn't do the full Gospel ministry for Peter. Never in Scripture do you have angels substituting for humans in the work of the Gospel. Instead, you have angels directing the work of the Gospel, protecting that work, getting people's attention for the work, and pointing people to that work,

and/or preparing people for the work.

So Sutcliffe says in his commentary that this angel in Revelation 14 was "superintending the revival of preaching, and of the spreading of the everlasting gospel."³ Vic Reasoner says,

Just as the dragon worked through the Roman empire, so the heavenly angel directs the evangelism of the Church. The preaching of the heavenly angel therefore is actually carried out through human "angels." An angel is a messenger, whether supernatural or human, and the characteristic of a messenger is that they are sent. We are commanded to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation. The early Church did just that...⁴

B. The role of the humans of verses 1-5

That's why verses 1-5 start with the human equation of evangelists. They are Christ's ambassadors of the Gospel. Indeed, without preachers being sent out, people will not be saved, period. But we might just as truly say that without the work of the angels in verses 6-20 they won't be saved. And without the work of Christ the Lamb of verse 1 and verses 14-16 they won't be saved. Humans are involved, but they are just one part of a marvelously orchestrated drama that involves heaven and earth. We are the forward troops and angels are the support troops.

You will notice in verse 6 that they possess the eternal gospel, but it doesn't say that they proclaim it. Their message in verse 7 is preparatory to the Gospel. It does not give the way of salvation. No one would be able to get saved just with those words. It is a message designed to turn people around, get their attention, bring repentance (and we will look at that message in a bit), but I believe it is the missionaries of verses 1-5 who actually proclaim the full gospel. Is this good news in a sense? Yes, because it is directing people to pay attention to the Gospel message. But they have the eternal gospel (it is something they work with), and that eternal gospel is "to be proclaimed" by others.

C. The role of the angels in verses 6-20

So if humans are doing the work of Gospel proclamation, what are angels doing? When angels command people to be saved in these verses, it has an impact on the success of the human agents. When angels pronounce judgment (the negative side of the Gospel) in verses 8-13 and again in verses

3 Joseph Sutcliffe, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testament*, 2 volumes (Salem, OH: Allegheny, n.d.), volume 2, p. 1099.

4 Vic Reasoner, [A Fundamental Wesleyan Commentary on Revelation](#)f6071e70-f7a4-40db-90c6-9a593d1fda1a (Evansville, IN: Fundamental Wesleyan Publishers, 2005), p. 383.

17-20, those judgments will happen to those who do not repent. But it motivates some to seek out the message of the Gospel and to believe it. It is a preparatory work.

In other words, missions is not simply the work of man on earth. It is always the kingdom of heaven invading earth more and more. John Frame says that these angels are probably around us every day ministering to us and through us. They are opening up opportunities to us to minister. We just tend to be shamefully blind to those opportunities. 1 Corinthians 11 says that they are right here in this worship service. Martin Luther said, "The angels are near us. ... although they stand before the face and in the presence of God and his son Christ, they are hard by and about us in those affairs which by God we are commanded to take in hand."⁵ They are involved.

So the answer to the question in your outlines: "What does an angel have to do with missions?" is, "He has everything to do with missions." Missions could not happen without their backup support. There is no such thing as genuine human missions without there being angelic missions accompanying it.

Why can I say that? Because Jesus said every single person who gets saved has angels (plural) rejoicing in his salvation. Let me read that verse. It's Luke 15:10 - "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" - even a single sinner. It appears that angels are somehow involved in and rejoicing over each elect sinner's salvation. That implies that there are at least some angels around to participate in and to witness that conversion. 1 Peter 1:12 says that the angels have an intense interest in the Gospel realities that we preach. In the book of Acts there was an elect Ethiopian Eunuch who had come to Jerusalem without hearing the Gospel and was heading back to Ethiopia still unconverted. God had prepared the way for the Gospel to be shared, but no one was taking advantage of it. So an angel moved Philip to preach to him. Luke 12:8-10 says that those who deny Christ will be denied by Christ before the angels and those who confess Christ before men (that's missions) will be confessed by Christ before angels. Why before angels? Because they are the main invasion forces of heaven to earth. That statement would make no sense if angels were not intimately involved in all missions work. Hebrews 1:14 says of angels, "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" That verse indicates that those angels are already at work in the elect person's life before he gets saved. They are

⁵ Martin Luther, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther* ed. Thomas S. Kepler (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1952), p. 279-280.

specifically sent "to minister for those who will inherit salvation."

And by the way, every time a person is converted, angels come into that home as that Christian's personal guardian angels. And every time that family has a covenant child, that child is given an angel according to Matthew 18:10. So when we moved to our new neighborhood some weeks ago, that neighborhood was literally invaded by angels. A new front of spiritual warfare was established and a new beachhead for the Gospel had arrived. That means Kathy and I needed to get busy to cooperate with this invasion from heaven.

Now, we weren't the best evangelists in our last neighborhood, but we still had an influence. I keep being blown away by the reports that come through the Neighborhood Watch from our old neighborhood. I'm kind of glad I hadn't unsubscribe from that email list yet. When we lived there we prayer walked that whole neighborhood regularly claiming it for Christ's kingdom and asking angels to protect and guard it. And it was phenomenal how the whole neighborhood improved in the 18 years we were there. Crime was very rare. But from the very day that we left six months ago to this very day, hardly a day goes by when there is not a report of some serious crime. Why? My guess is that our angels have left that neighborhood and demons have moved in. This is real stuff that we cannot ignore.

Anyway, back to our text, Robert Wall in his commentary points out that angelic involvement in missions is one of the consistent themes of this book. He says,

The function of angels throughout Revelation is to facilitate God's redemptive program; Did you get that? "The function of angels throughout Revelation is to facilitate God's redemptive program..." He goes on:

this is the role, then, of another angel that John saw flying in midair (cf. 8:13; 19:17). In particular, this first of a triad of angels proclaims the eternal gospel . . . to those who live on the earth. John uses the technical word for gospel only here in Revelation; its use is made more striking since the angel intends it for the lost inhabitants of earth rather than for the saints who have trusted its claims and have been redeemed from the earth. More specifically, the audience for this angelic proclamation of "good news" are those on earth who worship the beast (cf. 13:8); they are the enemies of God. This surprising point is further sharpened by John who distinguishes the 144,000, "who have been redeemed from the earth" (14:3; apo tÇs gÇs), from these unredeemed who dwell on the earth (epi tÇs gÇs).⁶

And it makes sense that there would be angelic armies accompanying the ministry of the 144,000. There are angels that accompany all of us. And they

⁶ Robert W. Wall, Revelation, NIBC 18; Accordance electronic ed. 18 vols.; (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 183. [accord://read/NIBC#22813](http://read/NIBC#22813)

are normally invisible because they are spirits. They do not have physical bodies.

Of course, they are not always invisible. From the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3), to Abraham (Gen. 18), to the followers of Jesus at the tomb (Mk. 16:5; Jn. 20:12), angels have sometimes visibly manifested themselves. In fact, the writer of Hebrews implies that this could be quite common. And I say that because the writer encouraged us to be hospitable to strangers because "some have unwittingly entertained angels" (Heb. 13:2). He is implying that it could happen to us, and that is why we ought to be motivated to entertain strangers. Both Kathy and I have seen angels visibly. But mostly, unless our eyes are opened like Elisha's servant had his eyes opened, the angels are invisible behind the scenes workers. 1 Timothy 5:21 says that they are constantly observing us as we live out our salvation.

II. Note that the gospel said to be "an eternal gospel"

Now I've given you this background worldview of angels to show that this chapter definitely follows the paradigm that other Scriptures do. Without the work of humans in evangelism (that's verses 1-5) salvation won't happen. Angels can't do that for you. You must be involved in strategizing how to make the invasion of heaven into your neighborhood to be more effective. There is a human element.

But without the work of angels in evangelism (that's verses 6-20), salvation won't happen. And without the work of Christ himself harvesting souls in verses 14-16, salvation won't happen.

As verse 6 words it, this angel has the eternal gospel. It's not just good news in general; it is the one and only eternal gospel. He is intimately involved in its promotion. Or as I have already quoted Sutcliffe as saying, he was "superintending the revival of preaching, and of the spreading of the everlasting gospel."

III. The imperative of the Gospel to every people group, including those that had just received judgment

A. *earth = Israel*

OK. Enough about angels for moment. Notice the imperative of this Gospel reaching every people group upon our planet. Verse 6 says, "having an eternal gospel to be proclaimed to those who reside on the earth and to every

ethnic nation and tribe and language and people..." Notice the "and." The Greek has a καὶ or an "and" after the earth, or literally, the land. There are two separate groups that are being addressed: the gospel continues to go to the land of Israel even after AD 70 and it also continues to go to every ethnic nation and tribe and language and people.

Now, let's think about how amazing the first phrase is. Israel had stubbornly refused to believe the Gospel, and had been hatefully persecuting Christians from the time of Christ up through the destruction of Jerusalem, and yet God in His infinite mercy continues to give an imperative that the Gospel must go forth to those Talmudists. I've been calling them Jews, but someone reminded me recently that Revelation 2 and 3 says that we shouldn't. They are better described as Talmudists. To me this is a staggering example of the infinite mercy of God. God insists on redeeming individuals out of that people group even after all of this obstinacy. According to Romans 11, there never would be a time when God would not convert some of these Christ-hating Talmudists to a Christ-centered Christianity.

The point is that the church never died in the geographical location of Israel. I have in my notes here the list of the 114 bishops of Jerusalem (or what we would call the moderator of the presbytery of Jerusalem) from the time of Acts to the time of the Reformation.⁷ There were 114 moderators of that

7 The list is as follows: James the Just (to 62) Simeon I (62-107) Justus I (107-112) Zacchaeus (112-116) Tobias (?) Benjamin I (?-117) John I (117-119) Matthew I (119-120) Philip (?-124) Senecas (?) Justus II (?) Levi (?) Ephraim I (?) Joseph I (?) Judas (?-134) Mark (134-156) Cassianos (?) Pouplios (?) Maximos I (?) Julian I (?) Gaius I (?) Gaius II (?) Symmachos (?) Julian II or Valens (?) Capion (?) Maximos II (?) Antonios (?) Valens (?) Dolichianos (?--185) Narcissus (185-212) Dios (?) Germanion (?) Gordios (?) Alexander (213-251) Mozabanus (251-266) Hymeneus (266-298) Zambdas (298-300) Hermon (300-314) Macarius I (314-334) Maximus III (334-348) Cyril I (350-386) John II (386-417) Praylius (417-422) Juvenal (422-458) Anastasius I (458-478) Martyrius (478-486) Sallust (486-493) Elias I (494-516) John III (516-524) Peter (524-544) Macarius II (544-552) Eustochius (552-564) Macarius II (564-575) second time John IV (575-594) Amos (594-601) Isaac (601-609) Zacharias (609-632) Modestus (632-634) Sophronius I (634-638) See vacant (638-?) Anastasius II (?-706) John V (706-735) John VI (735-760) Theodore (760-782) Elias II (782-797) George (797-807) Thomas I (807-821) Basil (821-842) Sergius I (842-844) See vacant (844-855) Solomon (855-860) See vacant (860-862) Theodosius (864-879) Elias III (879-907) Sergios II (908-911) Leontius I (911-929) Athanasios I (929-937) Nicholas (937) Christodoulus I (937-950) Agathon (950-964) John VII (964-966) Christodulus II (966-969) Thomas II (969-978) See vacant (978-981) Joseph II (981-985) Orestes (986-1006) See vacant (1006-1012) Theophilus I (1012-1020) Nicephorus I (1020-1048) Ioannikios (1048-?) Sophronius II (?-1059) Efthimios I (?-1084) Simeon II (1084-1106) Savvas (1106-?) John VIII (1106-1156) Nicholas (?-1156) John IX (1156-1166) Nikiphoros II (1166-1170) Leontius II (1170-1190) Dositheos I (1191) Mark II (1191-?) See vacant (?-1223) Euthemios II (1223) Athanasios II (1224-1236) Sophronios III (1236-?) Gregory I (?-1298) Thaddeus (1298) See vacant (1298-1313) Athanasios III (1313-1334) Gregory II (1332) Lazarus (1334-1368) Arsenios (1344) See vacant (1368-1376) Dorotheos I (1376-1417) Theophilus II (1417-1424) Theophanes I (1424-1431) Joachim (1431-1450) Theophanes II (1450-1452) Athanasios IV (1452-1460) Jacob II (1460) See vacant (1460-1468) Abraham I (1468) Gregory III (1468-1493) See vacant (1493-1503) Mark III (1503) See vacant (1503-1505)

presbytery. And just to show that there was actually a lot of turnover in the 200 years after James the Just died, there were 35 bishops of Jerusalem during the next 200 years. God's witness in Israel was not snuffed out by their rebellion. Where sin abounded, God's grace abounded much more. When I think of God's infinite mercy to Israel in those years following AD 70, I think of the hymn,

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me!

We are no better than they were. When you study the doctrine of total depravity, you will never again question why God sends people to hell or why He brings historical judgments. We all deserve hell. But when you study the doctrine of total depravity, you will never again be tempted to give even an ounce of glory to man for his salvation. It is all of grace; only grace. It is heaven invading earth.

B. every ethnic nation and tribe and language and people = far reaches of globe

But as we read earlier, this message did not just go to Israel. It also went "to every ethnic nation and tribe and language and people..." And if you track the growth of this world-wide missionary restart after AD 70, you will find missions finding its way to China, Africa, to North America in the second century and beyond, and to the far reaches of the globe. Yes, missionaries even came to North America in the first two centuries after Christ.

Archaeologists have found their money and burial places all along the Tennessee valley. And later, Irish missionaries came to North America. Anyway, we live in the age of missions. But we can never neglect the human component. If the missionaries of verses 1-5 are not prepared to act, the angels of verses 6-20 will not be able to act.

IV. Was the loud voice heard by men or was it the unleashing of other angels to prepare men for the Gospel?

Verse 7 says that this angel was "saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judging has come, and do obeisance to Him who made heaven and earth, the ocean and springs of water.'"

First of all, is there a historical record of a loud voice being heard after Jerusalem fell? I don't know, and in one sense it really doesn't matter because the Bible is the only record that we need. Some have pointed to the Talmud, which claims that a loud voice came from the vicinity of the Glory

Cloud on the Mount of Olives. And we have seen in the past that the Glory Cloud was filled with angels. The Talmud claims that this loud voice was saying,

'Return, O backsliding children (Jer. III, 14), Return unto Me, and I will return unto you (Mal. III, 7).' ... 'Give glory to the Lord your God, before it grow dark' (Jer. XIII, 16): before it becomes dark to you for lack of words of Torah, before it becomes dark to you for lack of words of prophecy, 'and before your feet stumble upon the mountains of twilight.'"⁸

I don't think much of the Talmud, so I don't give a lot of weight to that quote. But if you insist on a historical quote for a loud voice warning people to return to God, there is one.

Here is the thing - there are other places in the Bible where a loud voice came from heaven and certain people were able to make out the words and others could not. For example, in John 12:27 Jesus prays that the Father would glorify His name, and verse 28 says, "Then a voice came from heaven saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." What did the onlookers hear? Here's what verses 29-30 say,

John 12:29 ¶ Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him." John 12:30 ¶ Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake.

Certain people were able to make out the words, while others only heard what sounded like thunder. The same thing happened when Saul of Tarsus was converted in Acts 9. Let me read you that account:

Acts 9:3 ¶ As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Acts 9:4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Acts 9:5 ¶ And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" ¶ Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Acts 9:6 ¶ So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" ¶ Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." Acts 9:7 ¶ And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.

I find it interesting that even in that vision Jesus Himself didn't give enough detail for Saul to be saved. He had to hear those words from Ananias. So Jesus only gives so much information just like angels only give so much information. He wants people to be restricted to the message of the Bible.

8 Midrash Rabbah Lamentations Proems 25 cited in Ernest L. Martin, *Secrets of Golgotha: The Forgotten History of Christ's Crucifixion* (Alhambra, CA: ASK Publications, 1988), p. 84. The full quote is as follows: "R. Jonathan said: Three and a half years the Shechinah abode upon the Mount of Olives hoping that Israel would repent, but they did not; while a Bath Kol issued announcing, 'Return, O backsliding children (Jer. III, 14), Return unto Me, and I will return unto you (Mal. III, 7).' When they did not repent, it said, 'I will go and return to My place (Hos. V, 15).' Concerning that time it is said, 'Give glory to the Lord your God, before it grow dark' (Jer. XIII, 16): before it becomes dark to you for lack of words of Torah, before it becomes dark to you for lack of words of prophecy, 'and before your feet stumble upon the mountains of twilight.'" (Midrash Rabbah - Lamentations Prologue XXV)

In any case, Acts 22:9 clarifies that though they heard the sound of the voice and it frightened them, they couldn't make out the words. So it is very possible that this angel spoke in such a way that the elect could understand him, but others could not make it out. It is possible that all heard the words and understood them. And it is possible that only other angels heard the words and they jumped into action to help carry out the imperatives in verse 7. Any of those scenarios could fit what is being described here. The key point is that the angel was preparing the as-yet-unconverted-elect for the Gospel just as surely as Saul of Tarsus was prepared by His supernatural encounter to humbly receive the Gospel that would soon be preached by Ananias.

V. Notice the elements that are said to accompany the true Gospel:

But let's look at some of the elements that are said to accompany the true Gospel. I think these words need to be heeded by modern missions. They are a rebuke to modern missions.

A. *Fear of God*

Notice that the first words out of the angels mouth were definitely, "Smile. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." No, the first words out of this angel's mouth are, "Fear God." What a wonderful remedy for these citizens failure to believe in Jesus. Many of them no doubt feared repercussions from their Jewish leaders. But this angel is preparing them somehow to fear God more than they fear the beast.

And sometimes this is an absolute prerequisite to Muslims coming to Christ. They have been so indoctrinated that Christianity is heresy that they fear even listening to the Gospel, and when an angel appears to them and instills a holy terror of God's wrath and says that it is in Jesus alone that they can have safety, they are prepared to listen to the Gospel from a Christian. Why? Because fear of God has been instilled in them.

Sometimes the fear is generated simply from a visual manifestation of the angels. This happened in Ethiopia where I grew up many times. But if you have read many missionary biographies, you will find hundreds of stories of angels who protected missionaries by instilling fear in those who were about to kill them.

John Paton was a Reformed missionary in the New Hebrides Islands. One night hostile natives surrounded the mission station, intent on burning out the Patons and killing them. Paton and his wife prayed during that ... night that God would deliver them. When

daylight came they were amazed to see their attackers leave. A year later, the chief of the tribe was converted to Christ. Remembering what had happened, Paton asked the chief what had kept him from burning down the house and killing them. The chief replied in surprise, "Who were all those men with you there?" Paton knew no men were present--but the chief said he was afraid to attack because he had seen hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords circling the mission station.⁹

They must have been angels. Fear of God is often a necessary preparation for the Gospel. Sometimes people fear God by getting a new awareness of how their sins deserve hell. Other times the fear arises through a close call or a near accident that they were miraculously spared from. But there needs to be more fear of God in missions.

B. Giving God glory

The next thing this angel is concerned to produce in the as-yet-unbelieving-elect is a change in whom they glorify. This is not a message of self-esteem. The heresy of self-esteem is rife in the church of Jesus Christ. In fact, Schuller wrote a book declaring that this is the next Reformation - replacing the doctrine of total depravity with a doctrine of self-esteem.

But what does this angel say? He says, "Fear God and give Him glory..." This is the antithesis of what the natural heart wants to do. The natural heart seeks to glorify itself. But that means that there is a competition among men to be the most glorified, and the beast was at the top of the heap. As John Phillips worded it,

The one basic evangel, in whatever form it is cast, is fear God! glorify God! worship God! The special significance of the everlasting gospel lies in the fact that the Beast is saying to men. fear me! glorify me! worship me!¹⁰

Angels prepare the way for men to glorify God, but as we will see in upcoming weeks, the only way that can be achieved is by the power of the Triune God as Christ Himself draws souls to Himself. Idols must be destroyed before men will be willing to glorify God rather than the creation. And the idol of self-esteem must be ground to dust before people will believe the true Gospel.

C. Judgment to those who refuse the Gospel

The next phrase that the angel says is, "because the hour of His judging has come..." The tense of that verb is aorist, so it should technically say "because the hour of His judgment came..." We saw that in terms of chronology, these events came after Jerusalem had already fallen and after the judgment of that

⁹ Today in the Word, MBI, October, 1991, p. 18.

¹⁰ John Phillips, Exploring Revelation, John Phillips Commentary Series; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2004), 182. [accord://read/Phillips_Commentary#91295](http://read/Phillips_Commentary#91295)

city had already happened.

But what does judgment have to do with the Gospel? The self-esteem movement says "Nothing." Isn't the Gospel only about how to get to heaven and making them feel good? And the answer is a resounding "No." Ray Comfort points out that if you do not preach sin, and law, and judgment, and hell, you are not properly presenting the Gospel. You are certainly not imitating Jesus. Ray Comfort used an analogy. He asked us to imagine that we were flying along in an airplane and the pilot's voice came over the speakers saying sweetly, "We thank you for flying with us and we hope you enjoy your trip. For your flying comfort we have placed parachutes under your seats and we encourage you to put those on right now. We hope these help you to enjoy your trip." So you dutifully put the parachute on your back and try to act like it is comfortable and that you are enjoying the plane ride. Isn't this what the self-esteem movement promises? But before long that hump on your back starts giving you muscle cramps. You can't lean back and it feels heavy and hot. And to make matters worse the other passengers on the plane are mocking you and saying that you are foolish to wear a parachute in the plane. And you tell them that the pilot promised that you would have peace, joy, comfort, encouragement. And they laugh and ask, "Do you feel comfortable?" "No." "Do you feel joy?" "No." "Do you feel peace and encouragement?" "No." It's discouraging because of a false expectation; it's a false Gospel.

But contrast that with the message that comes over the speakers announcing that we are all in deep trouble. Both engines have quit and we will be crashing soon with no hope of survival unless you put the parachutes on your backs. The good news is that they happened to put parachutes under every seat, so please strap them on. As you strap your parachute on your back you have the same uncomfortable hump on your back; you're still hot. But you have peace and comfort because you know you are secure in the face of certain destruction. The message of the cross is not a happy message until people realize that they are lost. Without judgment it is not good news. Those who tell you to quit preaching judgment are unwittingly robbing the world of the Good News.

The angels in this chapter speak the warning, but they don't provide the parachute. In verse 8 it says, "And another, a second, angel followed, saying, 'It fell, it fell, Babylon the great!'" That's a message of judgment, but it perfectly fits into this chapter on missions. In verse 9 a third angel promises destruction to anyone who receives the mark of the beast. It's a message of judgment in this chapter on missions. Yes, verse 13 promises blessing, and

yes the angel in verse 15 helps Jesus to start reaping souls, but the angel in verse 17 preaches judgment again. In other words, they give a warning, not the parachute. The parachutes are provided by the 144,000. G. K. Beale says,

The angel is a messenger not primarily of grace but of judgment. He preaches to the unbelieving world. His announcement emphasizes the judicial side of the gospel more than the offer of grace.¹¹

D. Worship

The next thing that the angel directs the people to do is to worship the one true God, not the beast. He says, "and do obeisance to Him who made heaven and earth, the ocean and springs of water."

Aune says in his commentary,

The content of this εὐαγγέλιον is given in v 7; it is an appeal for repentance and conversion to the God who created heaven and earth in the context of impending judgment (v 8).¹²

In other words, people don't get converted so that they can be at ease and continue to serve themselves. They get converted because they are called to worship and serve God with everything that they have and are for the rest of their lives. He now is their sovereign. They must bow down and acknowledge that God is the Lord of their lives. Too many Gospel presentations are simply handing out airplane tickets to heaven. These truncated Gospels are a caricature of the true Gospel. The true Gospel is good news indeed because it declares rescue from an evil Sovereign (Satan) and slavery to a wonderful sovereign (God). But being under a sovereign is inescapable. You either worship the true God and bow your neck beneath his feet or you worship Satan and bow your slave's neck beneath his feet. The Sovereignty and Lordship of God leading to worship is an essential component of the true Gospel. It's not the full message, but it is an essential part of it.

E. Acknowledging God as creator, owner, and governor of all

And this is one of the reasons why the angel adds the fact that God is the creator, owner, and governor of all things. He isn't simply a vending machine who is there for our comfort. That is such a phony counterfeit of the Gospel. No. He is the Lord - "...and do obeisance to Him who made heaven and

11 G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 748.

12 David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, WBC 52B; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 825. accord://read/WBC-NT#71560

earth, the ocean and springs of water."

America has drifted so far away from the truth of the Scripture that we cannot even assume that they know who the true God is or that all things were created by this true God. The first two questions of Evangelism Explosion no longer make any sense to most post-modern American pagans because they don't believe in God. Those questions worked in the city where D. James Kennedy ministered because that generation still had a basic Christian worldview even though they were pagans. But that is no longer true. So Coral Ridge Ministries had to create a whole new evangelism program that includes creation, God's sovereignty, God's law, etc. They realize that if you ask most American pagans, "If you were to die today and stand before God and He were to say to you, 'Why should I let you into My heaven?' what would you say?" They would likely say, "I don't believe in God. When I die I will become dust and cease to exist." You won't even get past question one with them.

This is why Dr. Krabbendam always starts with Genesis 1 when he presents the Gospel to people and then (and only then) does he move to the fall into sin in Genesis 3, proving that all mankind has a bad heart, a bad record, and a bad life. A bad heart makes it impossible for him to turn to God or do anything good apart from grace. A bad record means that the just Judge of the universe must pronounce the judgment of eternal death against him. The bad life means that he is a slave to sin until by grace he becomes a slave to God and a slave to righteousness. But he starts with the fact that God created everything and that your every breath comes from God and that you owe God your life. You could not so much as oppose God unless God permitted it. In our postmodern world, it is critical that we start with creation. This is why it grieves me to the core of my being when I see so many Christians promoting evolution. Evolution completely undercuts the Gospel.

The point is that this angel did not have a trite message. It was a message that if heeded would turn people's lives upside down. It was the warning over the airplane's speakers that everything is about to crash and everyone will be in a world of hurt if they don't put the parachutes on. But it is men alone who have been entrusted with providing the parachutes to others through the sharing of the Scriptures.

VI. Conclusion

So if everything I have said today is true, then it means that you and I have responsibilities. Our responsibility is to take advantage of the preparatory

work of the angels and do something about it in our own neighborhoods. And here is the plan that I would recommend to each of you.

A. Pray strategically for 1) your neighbors and 2) work associates

First, the moment you moved into your neighborhood, it would have been good to dedicate that neighborhood to Christ and to start praying for that neighborhood. If you haven't done that already, its not to late to start. And actually most of you have two spheres of influence, the neighborhood that you live in and your work associates at your job. Start strategically praying for their salvation.

B. Draw maps of your work associates and your neighbors and record detailed information that will help you to connect and notice divine opportunities

Secondly, draw two maps - one of your work associates that you interact with on at least a monthly basis and one of your neighbors around your house. Try to get all the information you can about each person written down on those two maps. It will not only make your prayer life more concrete, but it will also help you to naturally converse with them. It will make it easier to ask how their kids are handling the death of the dog, etc. The more you remember about them each time you meet, the better. But most importantly, gaining information on these people will help you to be faith-focused on their salvation. It will make you more and more strategic in your prayers, words, and actions.

C. Ask God to send His angels to stir up opportunities to share the Gospel

Third, ask God to send His angels to open up opportunities to speak to the elect people whom God has prepared. It could be by bringing a disaster into their life that you can minister to. It could be that God has given them a sickness that you can pray over; or God has given them a baby. It could be by motivating them to join forces with you in opposing some tyrannical act of government. Just ask God to send His angels to stir things up in their lives and then to make you sensitive to be able to take advantage of what is happening. Divine appointments are those opportunities God has providentially prepared where you can share Christ with others. But by regularly praying in this way, you are again focusing your faith and expectation that something will indeed happen. Expect nothing and nothing will happen. Have great faith to expect great things from God in your

neighborhood and you are part way to having a faith to attempt great things for Him. And I would especially recommend that you regularly prayer walk your neighborhood with these facts in mind as you pray.

D. Ask others to join you in strategizing how to be more effective in this invasion of heaven into your neighborhood and work

Fourth, ask others to join you in believing God for converts from your neighborhood. Ask them to help you strategize on ways to open doors for conversation, whether that is by getting involved in the neighborhood watch, hosting a block party, inviting someone over for a dinner, offering a coke to someone who is mowing, or whatever. Two minds are better than one. Don't let God bypass you as an instrument of salvation by being lazy. Let's pray that every family in our church would have the opportunity to lead one soul to Christ in the next year. Treat yourself as a part of heaven's invasion of your neighborhood.

Now, you might be intimidated by all of this, but keep in mind that any discomfort you have is significantly less than the persecution and martyrdom that the 144,000 were likely to face. Between social media, cell phones, snail mail, and other easy forms of communication, we have it easy.

And as we go through this chapter, may God open our eyes to see the wonderful opportunities to have heaven invading earth. That is our ultimate goal - to be sensitive to the divine appointments that heaven provides for us to get involved. Please, don't disappoint the angels by neglecting their numerous attempts to nudge you forward. Be part of this divine plan for conquering planet earth. Amen.