

“Ministering Spirits”  
Hebrews 1:14  
(Preached at Trinity, September 24, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. The author has been pressing the infinite superiority of Christ over the angels. Angels were prominent in the Hebrew mind. One of the elements of the first century heresy known as Gnosticism involved the worship of angels.  
**Colossians 2:18-19 NAU** - "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on *visions* he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, <sup>19</sup> and not holding fast to the head."
2. To put angels in their proper place and admonish those being tempted to return to Judaism they were reminded of the infinite superiority of Christ over the angels.
  1. Jesus possesses a greater name – Verses 4-5
  2. Jesus possesses a greater exaltation – 6-7 – He claims all worship.
  3. Jesus possesses a greater throne – 8-9
  4. Jesus possesses a greater, unchanging, eternal glory – 10-12
  5. Jesus possesses a greater sovereign dominion as Lord and King – 13
3. Now in **Verse 14** we are reminded that the angels are the servants of Christ moving at His command. Jesus is superior to the angels because He reigns over them.  
**Psalms 103:20-21 NAU** - "Bless the LORD, you His angels, Mighty in strength, who perform His word, Obeying the voice of His word! <sup>21</sup> Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, You who serve Him, doing His will."
4. As we look at **Verse 14** our minds are drawn to consider the angelic realm, these ministering spirits God has ordained for our sake. Who are they? Although they are mentioned many times in the Bible—over 250 times, they also remain a great mystery. Many are not content with mysteries and invent clever schemes the Bible does not provide. We must avoid idle speculation as we study God's Word.
  - A. Where do they come from? They are God's creatures. But when were they created? We are not told. When Moses described the creation account, he only described the things seen, not the unseen.  
The only thing we are told in the Genesis account is there was a beginning, referring to the beginning of time, and that God existed before the beginning. The creation account is very basic.  
**Genesis 1:1** - "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."  
The rest of the chapter describes the six-day creation.  
**Genesis 1:31 NAU** - "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day."
  - B. That's all we are told. How do we know there was a six-day creation? Because the Bible tells us so. And our Confession affirms it. Our Confession also affirms: "After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female"

- C. When we come to **Chapter 3** the serpent intrudes into the Garden without any details. Where did he come from? Where does he fit into creation? We are not told of any creation other than **Genesis 1** so anything beyond that is conjecture.
- D. In **Revelation 12** we are told of a great dragon that swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. We interpret that as a description of Satan's fall along with the non-elect angels.
1. We are told they were expelled from heaven and thrown down to the earth  
**Revelation 12:4 NAU** - "And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. "
  2. This means the earth was in existence when Satan fell so we can conclude the angelic rebellion happened sometime between God creating the heaven and earth and the serpent appearing to Eve.
5. The number of angels is an innumerable host.  
There are countless numbers worshipping around His throne.  
**Daniel 7:9-10 NAU** - "I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took *His* seat; His vesture was like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, Its wheels were a burning fire. <sup>10</sup> "A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him"
6. Here in **Verse 14** they are described as ministering spirits.
- A. By "spirits" we are to understand they dwell in a realm outside our perception. They are invisible to our eye, yet their domain is very much a reality.
  - B. The word for "ministering" is an adjective modifying "spirits."  
It is only found in this verse. It refers to the performance of a service. To be employed in ministering.  
The next phrase gives us clarity - "sent out to render service"
7. Then he states the objects of the service:  
"for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?"  
They are sent forth to minister to God's elect.  
Why did God choose to employ angels in His Divine action? God doesn't need angels. He can work directly without them. But God uses many means as He fulfills His purpose.  
God created angels for us!  
Through His angels God is telling us how much He loves and cares for us. He has employed a myriad of angels who never sleep, who always have watch over us. They are for our encouragement. They are for our edification. That is my purpose this morning. It is expounding God's Word for your edification.
8. What were some of the works of service given to the angels?
- A. They were sent forth to announce the Law of God. We'll see this in **Chapter 2 Hebrews 2:2-3 NAU** - "For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, <sup>3</sup> how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"  
**Galatians 3:19 NAU** - "Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made."

- B. They were often used to make important announcements.  
**Matthew 1:20 NAU** - "But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."
- C. They also announced the resurrection of Christ.  
**Matthew 28:2-5 NAU** - "And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. <sup>3</sup> And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. <sup>4</sup> The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified."
- D. As ministering spirits, they were actively involved in the life and ministry of Christ.
- They were present at His birth.
  - They were present at His temptation.  
**Matthew 4:11 NAU** - "Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and *began* to minister to Him."
  - They were present during His agony in the garden  
**Luke 22:41-43 NAU** - "And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and *began* to pray, <sup>42</sup> saying, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done." <sup>43</sup> Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him."
  - They were present at His arrest and crucifixion
  - They were present at His Resurrection
  - They were present at His ascension
9. Consider the great ways God has used angels in the life of the elect.  
**Hebrews 1:14 NAU** - "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? "
- A. Daniel was smitten with sorrow over the sins of Israel and pleaded with God. God heard his prayers and sent Gabriel.  
**Daniel 9:20-22 NAU** - " Now while I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God in behalf of the holy mountain of my God, <sup>21</sup> while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in *my* extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering. <sup>22</sup> He gave *me* instruction and talked with me and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding."  
**Daniel 10:12 NAU** - "Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding *this* and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words."

- B. The women who rushed to the tomb after the Sabbath were still smitten with grief over the death of Christ. God sent His angels to encourage them in the resurrection of Christ.  
**Luke 24:1-7 NAU** - " But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. <sup>2</sup> And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; <sup>5</sup> and as *the women* were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, *the men* said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? <sup>6</sup> "He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again."
- C. The disciples were perplexed as they watched Jesus ascending beyond their vision. Again God sent His angels to encourage them.  
**Acts 1:9-11 NAU** - "And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."
- D. Herod ordered the beheading of James and then arrested Peter to execute him. God sent an angel to rescue him.  
**Acts 12:6-7 NAU** - "Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. <sup>7</sup> And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands."  
**Acts 12:11 NAU** - "When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."  
 Meanwhile the church was praying fervently for Peter.  
**Acts 12:12-15 NAU** - "And when he realized *this*, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. <sup>13</sup> When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. <sup>14</sup> When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. <sup>15</sup> They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel."

- E. We are in the midst of fierce spiritual wars – unseen battles raging all around us. God dispatches His angels to defend us, often completely removed from our eyes. In Elisha’s day the Arameans had surrounded the city with an army of chariots and horses in order to seize Elisha. God dispatched an army of angels to his defense.  
**2 Kings 6:15-17** – “And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that *be* with us *are* more than they that *be* with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain *was* full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.”
- F. John Owen: “Had he his liberty, Satan would make our whole lives to be filled with disappointments, horrors, vain fears, and perplexities, if he could proceed no further. Now in all these designs it is more than probable that he is prevented by the ministry of angels.”<sup>1</sup>
- G. The angels have great interest in the affairs of the elect from beginning to end. They are always watching and waiting for the salvation of the elect and always in their service.  
**Luke 15:10 NAU** - "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."
10. Their work is not yet complete. The Bible tells us they will be used of God in the last judgment.  
**2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 NAU** - "For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, <sup>7</sup> and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, <sup>8</sup> dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, <sup>10</sup> when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed-- for our testimony to you was believed."  
**Matthew 13:41-42 NAU** - "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, <sup>42</sup> and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."  
**Matthew 16:27 NAU**- "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds."  
**Matthew 25:31-32 NAU** - "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;"

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<sup>1</sup> John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. W. H. Goold, vol. 20, Works of John Owen (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1854), 252.

11. And there is angelic involvement in the death of God's elect – as we cross from this world to the next.  
**Luke 16:22** – “And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;”  
**Mark 13:27** – “And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.”  
**1 Thessalonians 4:16-17** – “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”
12. What about the concept of guardian angels
- A. This is often disputed but there are verses that seem to imply particular angels given watch-care over men.  
**Matthew 18:10 NAU** - "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you, that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven."
- B. Another verse is Acts 12:15  
**Acts 12:15 NAU** - "They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel."  
 Calvin raised doubt over the guardian angel concept because it limits the fact there are vast numbers of angels in service to God's elect -  
 “But whether individual angels have been assigned to individual believers for their protection, I dare not affirm with confidence . . . For if the fact that all the heavenly host are keeping watch for his safety will not satisfy a man, I do not see what benefit he could derive from knowing that one angel has been given to him as his special guardian.”<sup>2</sup>

#### Conclusion:

1. Calvin is reminding us of the truth of God's abundant care for His elect. He uses His angels to minister to us, often in ways we'll never know.
2. But we don't praise the angels, much less worship them. They are but God's ministering spirits. But they are faithful in their deportment and careful in their care of God's elect.
3. We've all heard stories from afar as missionaries testify of God's care through His angels. Kent Hughes tells one such story of John Patton and his wife:  
 “On a dark night about a hundred years ago, a Scottish missionary couple found themselves surrounded by cannibals intent on taking their lives. That terror-filled night they fell to their knees and prayed that God would protect them. Intermittent with their prayers, the missionaries heard the cries of the savages and expected them to come through the door at any moment.  
 But as the sun began to rise, to their astonishment they found that the natives were retreating into the forest. The couple's hearts soared to God. It was a day of rejoicing!

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<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, Edited by John T. McNeill, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), I, XIV, 6-7 – Page 167.

The missionaries bravely continued their work. A year later the chieftain of that tribe was converted. As the missionary spoke with him, he remembered the horror of that night. He asked the chieftain why he and his men had not killed them. The chief replied, “Who were all those men who were with you?” The missionary answered, “Why, there were no men with us. There were just my wife and myself.” The chieftain began to argue with him, saying, “There were hundreds of tall men in shining garments with drawn swords circling about your house, so we could not attack you.”<sup>3</sup>

4. We must not fear to confess there are endless ways God cares for His people. He has created a multitude of heavenly host to minister to their care.

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<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*, vol. 1, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 41.