

98-04-17b

Okay, we are back now from our break. And we're taking somewhat of an unorthodox look at the role of angels, or the relationship between the terms spirit, spirit of God, and angels, especially in the Old Testament, with the goal of coming to a better understanding of passages that seem at first glance to be puzzling, like Genesis 6, verse 3, and others, where the line seems to be blurred between the spirit of God as the Holy Spirit, and spirit of God, which is in reference to angels, and by so doing, to help us clarify our understanding of the ministry of angels to us, as well as the ministry of the Holy Spirit to us. If you turn with me to Psalm 18.10, there is the vision that David presents of God coming as a result of his cry of distress.

He says in Psalm 18.6, In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God. He heard my voice from his temple, and my cry came before him, even to his ears. Then the earth shook and trembled.

The foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, because he was angry. Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth. Coals were kindled by it.

He bowed down to heavens also, and came down, with darkness under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub and flew. He flew upon the wings of the Ruach, which is generally translated wind.

But when you look at the parallel there in verse 10, He rode upon a cherub and flew. He flew upon the wings of the Ruach. You have cherub and Ruach in parallel, seemingly referring to the same idea.

We know that cherubim have wings. God is flying, as it were, on a cherub, being carried along by his wings. And this is one of several passages in the Old Testament that closely associates the idea of God's spirit, or a Ruach, and angels.

We noted in our first session tonight the difficulty we have in figuring out which is which sometimes, such as in Jonah. The psalm, by the way, in Psalm 18, is a second copy of this psalm, which is also found in 2 Samuel chapter 22. It's a psalm of David, on the day that the Lord delivered him from the hands of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.

This is one of the ways in which God has preserved the evidence for reconstructing the original Hebrew text, where it has suffered loss. To get two different copies of the same psalm and compare the two, they've been preserved in separate books, sometimes in separate manuscript traditions. The accidents that can happen to a manuscript, it's so great.

It would be like having the Gettysburg Address written down by someone who listened to Lincoln give it, and then a copy of a copy of a copy that someone made from the

envelope that he wrote it on while he was riding on the train, and comparing the two to try to reconstruct the actual speech. It's much better to have a second witness to the original. Psalm 18 gives us that with 2 Samuel 22.

In both cases, this language is the same, and the idea of God traveling accompanied by Cherubim, whether he is in human form with other angels who appear to be in human form, or whether he is flying through the air as Ezekiel sees him, or whether he is pictured sitting in the throne room of the third heaven the way John sees him in Revelation. All of these passages that we have looked at, the presence of God is always associated with these heavenly creatures that we call angels, that are also often referred to as spirits. The Cherubim that were to represent the holiness of the presence of God were woven into the fabric of the tabernacle.

If you look in Exodus 25, verse 20, you have that as well. We've seen some other passages regarding the temple in 1 Kings 6, verse 27, and 1 Kings 8, verses 6 and 7. These are just samples which I will let you turn to since we have looked at them on Sunday. Also, 1 Chronicles 28:18. All of these are references to the Cherubim that symbolize the actual Cherubim that guard the throne of God and accompany the presence of God wherever it goes.

And of course, the famous passages are in Ezekiel. Ezekiel chapter 1, verses 6 through 25, where Ezekiel sees God's presence surrounded by these living creatures that have the faces and the wings and accompany him wherever he goes. They are mentioned again in Ezekiel 3:13 and in chapter 10, verses 5 through 21.

What is the point of all of this? That when God wants to express agency, how is he accomplishing something? How is he effecting his purposes? God can do that in a number of ways. All that is required from God is a word. When God says, let there be light, there is light.

When God says, let the light be separated from the darkness, let the waters be separated from the waters, let the dry land appear, all God has to do is speak and things happen. God is all-powerful and God is all-knowing. Why doesn't God just do that all the time? He seems to work through agents.

He asks people to go through procedures sometimes to receive healing or to receive provision or to see God's will accomplished. Obviously, God could do everything by fiat, as they say in Latin, just his spoken authority. He could make things happen.

God, obviously being omniscient, knows everything instantly, has known it from eternity past, will always know it. He is beyond anything we can imagine. And yet, as we noted in the first session, the Bible often speaks of angels relaying information to God.

Turn back again to Genesis chapter 6 for an example of this, an indirect example here.

Actually, it's not in chapter 6. God there looks on the earth. This is an example of God's direct observation in verse 12.

It says, the earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. So there is a statement of God's direct observation.

But when you go forward to the time of the Tower of Babel, a few chapters forward in Genesis, look in Genesis chapter 11. The whole earth had one language and one speech. It came to pass as they journeyed from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar.

They dwelt there. They said to one another, come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly. They had brick for stone.

They had asphalt or pitch for mortar. They said, come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower whose top is in the heavens. Let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.

And of course, God had commanded them, be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth. And they said, well, let's keep that from happening. Let's all create some centralized worship here.

We'll build this big ziggurat. We'll observe the stars, and we'll unify ourselves, and we won't spread out. Which was against the will of God.

But in verse 5, the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the Son of Man had built. It says that God came down to see it. You get the idea that this may have been another one of these Genesis 17 things where God takes some sort of bodily form and actually walks around and looks at it.

Well, if he's coming down to see it, there's an indication that he couldn't, or wasn't seeing it as well from where he was up in heaven. And that reports came to God that this evil was being done. And he said, well, I've got to go see that for myself.

And so he got his accompanying angels and went down and took a look. It is obviously language of accommodation. There's no need.

It's not like God would be ignorant if he did not come down and look. But it's interesting that the Bible presents God in this way. And in several places in Scripture, you have the idea of God receiving reports from angels.

And he says, let us go down and have a look. Or, here are the guardian angels of these little ones that you need to be aware of, Jesus says. Because they are reporting to the Father.

He doesn't say my Father is watching each and every one of them. He says their angels are standing before my Father, reporting. So, if you harm one of them, you might as well

just go get a millstone and jump in the lake.

Because it's going to be worse for you when God finds out what you're doing to these little ones. What is the point of all of this? God could do everything in his omniscience, but instead he uses agents. We have evidence of angelic conflict.

When you go over to Daniel and in some of the prophets, there are passages that indicate that there is a warfare between angels. Now, is there some sort of force in the universe that is sufficient to give God sort of an equal fight? Can Lucifer and the fallen angels put up a fight that God could not just speak and instantly annihilate them all? When God says let there be something, it is. And if God says let it not be, Satan and all of the fallen angels and all the rest of us for that matter could disappear in a tiny atomic particle of time at God's spoken word.

Why is there a battle? Why is there a struggle between angels? Between the angels who are sometimes referred to as elect, who are unfallen, and those who are accompanying Lucifer. Why is it that God would use an agency such as angels to accomplish his purpose? Why does God use human beings to accomplish his purpose rather than simply accomplishing it himself? Well, it is obviously for our benefit more so than for his. All of us that have been around little children, whether they're your own or not, if you're responsible for watching them or whatever and you're engaged in an activity, maybe you're just putting away dishes or you're folding laundry or whatever, what is the fastest and most efficient way to get that task done? Rope the kids off in a corner somewhere and do it yourself.

But you take them and encourage them to participate. You teach them to fold the clothes. You show them where to tupperware.

You hand them all the plastic non-breakable stuff and say, well, put this away and put these nice plastic spoons away and so forth. And involve them. It slows you down.

It's not as efficient as doing it yourself, but it is for their benefit. You're hoping that they will learn and have a sense of participation and a sense of accomplishment. It is all for their benefit and maybe for yours on down the road when they know how to do these things and you can retire.

But we get the sense because God does call himself the Father and we are his children that he's doing the same with us and evidently he is doing the same with the angels and with all of his sentient or conscious and self-aware creation, involving us in his plan and setting tasks for us to accomplish, which he could accomplish much more perfectly, infinitely more perfectly and quickly and well than we can, but he slows down and involves us in his plan. And it's a wonderful thing to remember that that's why we're here. God has the same love for us that parents have for children and the same desire for us to learn as we participate in his plan and as we are ministered to by the word and

by the spirit to do these things.

And it reminds us that God is a compassionate God. He is a loving God. He wants the best for us.

That's why he's not just going out and doing everything himself. That's why he doesn't evangelize everyone by the inner witness of the spirit and never have a believer share the truth. That's why he uses fallible human communicators to teach his word instead of just entrusting it to the spirit, communicating it directly to our souls in a pure, perfect and predigested form.

We interact with each other. We're gifted in different areas of spiritual benefit and blessing to others, whatever that area may be. Sometimes it's encouragement.

Sometimes it's just knowing what someone needs and being able to do that, making a meal at the right time or babysitting at the right time or praying at the right time, giving a word of encouragement or a word of truth. These are ways in which God expresses grace toward creation through others in his creation. God is doing that with the angels.

We don't need guardian angels. Is God weak that he can't watch over us himself? Why would anyone need a guardian angel? We don't, really. But God has obviously assigned some of them that task.

There are angels that have been assigned to watch over nations. There are angels that have been entrusted with sending messages to man and various other functions, all of which God could perform himself, and yet he uses his creatures instead. If you look in Daniel chapter 10, Daniel in chapter 9 and in chapter 10 has been praying to God.

We won't go into all the details of that prayer, but he's been seeing these visions about the future of history and so forth. And in Daniel 10.10, he says, Suddenly a hand touched me which made me tremble on my knees and on the palms of my hands. And he said to me, O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the word that I speak to you and stand upright for I have now been sent to you.

While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling. Then he said to me, 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.

Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision that you have seen refers to many days yet to come. But this is a fascinating passage, because it indicates that God permits struggle. He permits opposition to the fulfillment of his will and his plan by others in creation, by obviously the

fallen angels that follow Satan.

You get the idea that this opposition of the messenger of God to Daniel, and this is an important message. This angel is bringing words that are going to become a part of inspired scripture to Daniel, and God's will and God's desire is to honor the prayer of Daniel. The angel says, Look, Daniel, God heard your prayer from the very beginning, but it took me three weeks to get here because of this opposition.

And God didn't simply speak and blow the opposition away and say, Wait a minute, this is going to be a part of the Bible. Get this prince of Persia business out of the way here and let's get this on the road. God left it to his creatures to resolve this struggle and to prevail in this struggle, in this case, by helping each other.

And you have an illustration in the angelic realm or in the heavenly creature realm of the same principle that applies in our lives as believers in the church, in this case, where rather than God stepping in with his sovereignty and his omnipotence, here's another angel, Michael, that comes over and helps this angel get loose from his opposition so that he can accomplish God's perfect will. But I want to direct your attention especially to verse 12, Daniel 10, 12. Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day... What happened on that first day? From the first day that you set your heart to understand and to humble yourself before your God.

God detailed an angel from heaven to go to Daniel on the day that Daniel set his heart to understand and when he humbled himself before God. Your words were heard and I have come because of your words. Isn't it an amazing thing? Here's a man.

At this time, Daniel's not famous. He's not well-known. He's not the biblical figure that we think of.

He's a captive. He's in a strange land. He's mixed up in some of this palace intrigue and so forth.

And he's praying three times a day, just like David. Remember in the Psalms, evening and morning, and at noon will I pray and cry aloud. We have a pretty good example of thrice daily prayer in the scriptures.

This is what Daniel is doing. But Daniel, on one particular day, reaches a pitch of intensity in his desire to understand the things of God. He's been seeing these visions and interpreting dreams for a long time, hasn't he? Since he was a young man.

But the more he learns, the more fervent he becomes. And there is a day when, in one of his daily prayers, he goes to God. And he has so set his heart on the things of God, and has so humbled himself before God, that God, up in the third heaven, sitting in the midst of the sea of glass with all the flaming seraphim and cherubim and everything else, God speaks and says, You, you go to Daniel and deliver this word.

God in heaven sends an angel to speak to a human being. To go down there and answer his prayer and meet his need. It's just, to me, that is such an awesome thought.

That here's the entire universe to run. And there's one guy on a tiny planet in a tiny solar system in the midst of one galaxy out of millions. And God is up there with all of the heavenly creation and all the rest of human history going on.

One man is faithful and humbled and prays and asks for understanding. And God in heaven speaks. And an angel comes and fights his way for three weeks through opposition to get there and be the provision of God for Daniel.

That is apparently a role that angels fulfill behind the scenes in human history. They are agents for the fulfillment of God's will. And apparently, from the interchange of the use of Ruach, they express and manifest the power of God's spirit when they do so.

How is it that they prevail against opposition when they're fighting fallen angels and so forth? Why doesn't God just speak and blow it all away? Obviously, it is for their benefit just as the opposition in our lives is for our benefit. God permits these things. God puts resources at the disposal of his creatures and stands back and lets them figure it out.

It's a great model for child training. Whenever your child is struggling, do you just reach down and help them finish? It takes a lot of self-discipline. But do you stand back and let them struggle and let them learn? And in the course of the struggle, learn things that they could never learn with your help.

God is a wise father. It's an important thing to remember because sometimes when we're in the midst of a problem or a struggle or a conflict or whatever it is, and we're praying, we say, God, I've been pestering you about this, I pray about this all the time, and this problem is not going away. Well, why is it that God hasn't given a big yes answer and immediately evaporated this circumstance? He's like a good father standing back and saying, Pretty soon you're going to wake up and realize that I have given you all of the resources you need, all of the tools, all of the necessary things, all the provisions of grace are right there, and I'm standing back and leaving you in the midst of this muddle so that you can learn how to function.

It's all for our benefit. There's nothing that God can't do. There's nothing he doesn't know.

But he permits these things to play themselves out in the lives of his creatures so that we benefit and we learn. God did this in the early days of creation. He makes provision through the angels to teach early human civilization how to function, how to grow crops, how to engage in industry and so forth, and he does it today.

God provides for us through agents, and sometimes they are fallible agents, and sometimes we have to wait just the way Daniel had to wait, and Daniel's communicating

angel here needed some help. You would think, well, you mean God almost didn't win that battle? It isn't God. It's the angels.

They're learning. They are employing resources. They apparently are implementing the power of God's spirit in some sort of a similar fashion that we do, and they assist each other.

They minister to each other just as we are called to minister to each other, and we begin to realize that the fabric of God's plan, the principles that guide his dealings with us, guide his dealings with all his creatures, and the relatively small amount of information that we have about angels is useful to us, not just to fill the bookstore shelves with books about angels and speculation, but when the Bible mentions angels, there is something there that we can learn and apply for ourselves. So these are tantalizing glimpses of life beyond our visible universe, and we realize that there is a civilization of heavenly creatures that have their own organization, their different ranks and functions of angels, the principalities and powers and rulers, and some of them have oversight roles at the national level and some of them at the individual level and apparently at all the levels in between, and all of these functions that they fulfill are mediating or being agents for the grace of God and the provision of God and the power of God. How does the power of God enter the lives of believers? It's through God's spirit and through God's word.

Can one spirit-filled believer minister to another? What is a spiritual gift? That's what it is. God's spirit can minister to me through another believer in whom he is active and is able to accomplish God's purpose. God is able to minister to mankind through his angels, apparently in whom his spirit is active and able to work his will.

So it should not surprise us that when God indicates that his spirit is administering man, that this would be through an angelic agency as we have it in Genesis chapter 6. But it is something of a novel thought when we're accustomed to believing that angels have their own sort of self-contained angelic power and that they're not actually agents for God's power. So it's something worth meditating on and thinking about. If you look at Psalm 104 verses 3 and 4, and this was a part of our scripture reading last Sunday, a wonderful set of psalms in Psalm 104 and 105.

Psalm 104 begins, Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord, my God, you are very great. You are clothed with honor and majesty.

You cover yourself with light as with a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a curtain. And here's another one of those cases where the person changes.

This is a psalm of praise addressing God in the second person. You do this. You are clothed with honor and majesty.

And then it shifts. He lays the beams of the upper chambers in the water. Who makes

the clouds his chariot.

He doesn't say you make the clouds your chariot. He shifts from addressing God to addressing the listening audience. He lays the beams of his upper chambers in the waters.

Who makes the clouds his chariot. Who walks on the wings of the wind. The wings of the ruach.

Again. Who makes his angels ruachot. Spirits.

His ministers a flame of fire. In the preceding psalm, Psalm 103, if you look at verse 15. This is in that wonderful section.

In fact, this is a great one to memorize if you haven't already. In Psalm 103, 11. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward those who fear him.

How high are the heavens above the earth? What is the distance to the nearest star? That is how great God's mercy is toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him.

Of course, pity is not really a very good translation of this word. It means tender affection. As we have just been discussing.

For he knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass.

As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the Ruach passes over it and it is gone. It is one of those classic Hebrew double entendres here.

Where it is true that the wind passes over the grass and the flower of the field. And the east wind comes and dries something up and it vanishes. And its place remembers it no more.

But if we are a human being over whom the spirit passes. Even though our days are no more. The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him.

And his righteousness to children's children. To such as keep his covenant. And to those who remember his commandments to do them.

The role of the angels as watchers is fascinating. It serves a dual purpose of being a ministry to us and also instructive for them. Turn with me to Genesis chapter 28.

This is the very famous episode. If you saw the TBS or Turner production on Jacob. They did a good job of visualizing this.

Jacob's ladder in Genesis 28. And this is something that Jesus refers to rather obliquely. When he says you will see the angels ascending and descending on the son of man.

But in Genesis 28 verse 11. Jacob has gone out from Beersheba and gone toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there all night because the sun had set.

And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head. And he lay down in that place to sleep. Then he dreamed and behold the ladder was set up on the earth.

And its top reached to heaven. And there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. We think well this is great.

What a wonderful vision. But stop and think about that for a moment. What are these? What is the purpose of this? There is a bridge or a ladder between heaven and earth.

And there are angels going back and forth. Well, what kind of angels are these? Are they unfallen or fallen? We would surmise that they are unfallen because they are going to and from heaven. And the fallen angels are fallen because they have fallen from heaven and they don't typically go back up there.

So God's ministering angels are going back and forth from heaven to earth. They have an interest in what's going on on the earth. They have been detailed by God to do certain things on the earth.

And Jacob's ladder indicates that there is active movement on the part of the angels between heaven and earth. Then of course Jesus refers to this in John, I believe it's at the beginning of the book, when he says you will see angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man. This is in John 1.51 where he finds Nathaniel who had been sitting under the fig tree, another one of those great fig tree passages.

Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward him in John 1.47. He said of him, Behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile or no deceit. Nathaniel said, How do you know me? Jesus answered and said, Before Philip called you when you were under the fig tree, I saw you. Nathaniel answered and said to him, Rabbi, you are the Son of God.

You are the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said to him, Because I said to you I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these. He said to him, Most assuredly I say to you, Hereafter you shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

Very clear and direct reference back to Genesis chapter 28 where now Jacob's ladder is more clearly seen as Jesus himself. What does all of that mean? Who is the bridge between God and man? Who is the bridge between heaven and earth? Of course it's Jesus Christ. He is the new and living way.

And we think of him as the way of access like it says in Hebrews chapter 10. He is the one that makes it possible for us to go and stand boldly before the throne of grace. What we don't often remember is that the angels of God ascend and descend through that same grace.

And because of that same savior and the grace of God is mediated to us not only directly through the Holy Spirit and directly through the word of God but also indirectly through God's ministering spirits through the angels. And we're covering this in part to try to bring some balance to the whole fad of angel interest that has come about here in the last few years. We have series on television.

We have books and pictures and movies are coming out where angels are coming around deciding whether or not they want to marry young ladies on the earth and so forth which as we were talking about on the break is kind of remarkable. When you think about Genesis 6 they're resurrecting an old, very, very old theme there. But we don't want to lose the legitimate understanding of the fact that there are angels and that God does use them actively in human history.

There are in fact angels assigned to the little ones of the kingdom and that's us. There are in fact angels who behold the face of the Father and who have a reporting function. It would be interesting.

We know that God is on mission. But if God sent an angel and said I want you to watch and report to me well if you're going to go give a report to somebody who already has all the facts you know that your ability as a reporter is on the line here because God already knows more than you're going to be able to tell him. But God has assigned these functions to the angels.

It's legitimate for us to understand them. It's legitimate for us to look at that and see it as a manifestation and an expression of God's grace and not to lose sight in all of the popular misunderstanding and abuse of the concept of angels to lose sight of the fact that the Bible has quite a bit to say about them. From the earliest days of civilization God has used angels to minister to men.

And down through the present angels watch. There's a great old Blackwood Brothers song. Angels watches over me.

And they do. They really do. And it is an expression of God's grace.

They are learning. Women have authority. The reason a man is to be the head of his household and is to exercise biblical leadership and biblical authority in his marriage and in his home is not only for his own well-being and obedience to God but Corinthians tells us women have authority on their heads because of the angels.

There are teaching points that God is making to his angelic heavenly creation using us

as illustrations in the same way that we look in the Bible and see them as illustrations. And the authority concept that is mirrored in marriage of Christ and the church and so forth is identified in scripture as a teaching point to angels. They have authority on their head because of the angels.

Angels watch us intently. Angels observe human history. Angels participate in human history.

And angels not only minister to us but from Daniel we know they minister to each other. All of these things are done in the power of God. It's not creature power.

It's not human strength. And it's not angelic strength. It's divine power.

It's divine grace that is at work in all of these different areas. And it's a reminder to us that we serve the living God. It's his spirit.

It's his word that enables and empowers everything in the universe. And it's a great comfort to see the measure and extent of God's care for us and his compassion for us. He remembers that we are dust.

He knows our frame. He forgives us our sins. He watches over us.

And he stands back and lets us test and learn to use the resources that he has put at our disposal. Our problems are a blessing. Our challenges are a blessing.

When we wait three weeks as Daniel did for the answer to a prayer, it is a blessing. It is something that prepares us in this life for future things in this life and also prepares us for the next life and for a life face-to-face with God. So it's an exciting concept.

It gives us a better understanding of why we see angels in Scripture, why some part of their civilization and their dealings with God is revealed to us. All of these things are written for our instruction to remind us of the God we serve, the God who loves us, and the God who desires to unite us to himself. This is a good place to pause.

And, of course, on Sunday we'll pick up in Genesis chapter 6 and go forward to see what God does about the great evil that he observes on the earth. And even in judgment we will see the expression of God's wonderful grace. Let's close here in prayer.

We thank you, Father, for revealing yourself to us through the pages of Scripture, through the record of the coming of the Lord Jesus and his teaching and his ministry among us. We thank you for the many ways that you express your grace toward us, including the ministering spirits that participate in our lives and in our history. We thank you for sound information that keeps us from becoming strange and peculiar in regard to some of the things that we do not fully understand and are not fully informed about.

We pray that in all of these things we will remember the place that we hold in your plan

and in your love and the union that we share with your Son, Jesus Christ, and that we will recognize the purpose for all of these great provisions that you have made, which is to take us as babes in Christ and teach us to grow and to become a mature man, reaching the fullness of everything you have for us in this life and in the age to come. We pray that you will go with us as we engage in the activities of the weekend and that we will be motivated by these things to condition each thought and each action to be to the praise of your glory. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.