

But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? (Heb 1:13)

I have had an extreme interest lately, sparked by all the discussion of eschatology, in the angelic race. There isn't a lot specifically given to us in Scripture about angels, but you can't look at the second coming of Christ and the destruction of this creation without seeing them directly involved in those events.

So today, I want to look at some observations we can make about angels from the Scripture, which I think are instructive and potentially comforting to us in our pilgrimage. I have tried to be circumspect in this, and not make a lot of stretched or assumptive arguments, as I find a lot of expositors speculate and assign meaning to things that I find less than compelling. These are simple observations, not a detailed analysis of their character or the visions various people have of them.

Observation 1: The angels are created beings

Understanding this is critical to a proper appreciation of angels. The existence of the angels isn't just some fleeting and fanciful idea or some theoretical concept of creatures that are part of the Biblical "story". Angels are not metaphorical. They are not an allegory or way for Scripture to provide our minds ways to understand things. These are living beings that occupy this universe with us. They are their own creation, not the spirits of dead humans – please understand that. Angels and the 'spirits of just men made perfect' are not the same thing.

"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him." (Col 1:16)

Angels operate and live in a realm or plane of existence which we cannot detect with the physical makeup of our bodies – they are natively invisible to all our senses, and I believe they are at least part of the 'invisible' referred to here.

They are spiritual creatures, referred to as spirits several times, which basically seems to mean that they have no permanent bodily state or makeup, though they can and do take various forms at times when they are in the presence of men:

"Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire." (Psa 104:4)

"But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb 1:13-14)

This word spirits means 'wind' or 'breath' in both the Hebrew and the Greek. This is differentiated from Man, who has solid mass, is clearly made up of matter and is bound by many different physical laws. The angels, like God, have no imprisoning body to limit their movement, their speed, their intellect, etc. They are like a breath of wind that cannot be seen on its own, but whose effects are readily and apparently present in the whole earth.

This gives them abilities we can only imagine and can't comprehend the 'how' of their use and execution. Consider, for example when Philip left the Ethiopian eunuch:

“And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.” (Act 8:39-40)

Some expositors like to make this out that all the Spirit did is move Philip to leave, that because no one was present to validate the miracle, no miracle could have been committed. I'm not sure what they do with the Ethiopian standing there watching Philip disappear, but there you have it. I believe this being 'caught up' means that he was taken, physically taken by the angel and moved to Azotus which is thought to be 30 or 40 miles from where he baptized the Ethiopian. This was also was the case with Paul being caught up into the third heaven and Elijah at the end of his earthly mission. Being caught up doesn't mean influenced or having something suggested to you. It means being taken. Just because we can't explain or understand a thing, doesn't mean we should try to add meaning where meaning isn't. The angel picked him up and moved him.

I can't explain how the spirit did this, but I can't explain a lot of things, and that doesn't make them impossible. These spirits can do amazing things in their execution of duties, and that should guide and inspire us to behaviors and actions that emulate them as best we can. They provide for us a great example of using the skills and abilities we have been given in service to God with dedication and focus.

These spirits are called mighty

“And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,” (2Th 1:7)

And strong

“Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.” (Psa 103:20)

Not just strong, but they ‘excel in strength’, the implication being that they use that strength to its fullest. They aren’t just strong in the general sense; they demonstrate their strength on a regular basis with how they carry out the commands of our King.

They are swift. Running, like use of their strength, is not a foreign thing to them:

“And, behold, the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, And said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein:” (Zec 2:3-4)

While amazing and beyond our explanation, they are not omnipresent, omnipotent, or omniscient. They are told to go, as we see here in Zechariah, so they are not present in all places at all times – they go, they return and they go again. They cannot try the hearts of men as God does. They are not discerners of the thoughts and intents of the heart – though magnificently powerful, these are capabilities they do not have. These are still the creations of the great I Am.

There are a multitude of them, though we do not know their exact number. Like men, it seems that there are a finite number of them, but we aren’t told precisely how many.

“Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Mat 26:53)

At this time in the Roman Empire, a legion would have been between 5,200 and 6,000 men, so approximately 60,000 to 70,000 angels, *at least*. Now, in comparison to the mighty armies of men in place today, that might not mean much, but consider what **one** was able to do:

“Then the angel of the LORD went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.” (Isa 37:36)

Consider the great restraint Christ exhibits here in not calling forth those legions and staying the course the covenant required. While that’s a discussion for another day, it is an important perspective to keep in mind when considering the angels.

“The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.” (Psa 68:17)

Here is an interesting verse to me, because it seems to give us a specific count of the heavenly host, but when you look at the original, these numbers are relative and indicate, in its simplest view, ‘many’ or ‘multitudes’. I believe one conclusion to draw from this is that numbers don’t ultimately matter, and we don’t need to focus on them.

We are bombarded routinely by rabid, screaming lunatics obsessed with our numbers. They don't matter, friends. It is of no consequence, and when we are surrounded by these mobs it is important to remember what Jonathan told his young armorbearer "there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" (1Sa 14:6) – He has legions of angels to dispatch, and where one is sufficient, He will use one.

Observation 2: Angels are not to be worshipped in any way

When contemplating the angels, it is important that we always remember that they are created beings, just as we are, not part of the Godhead and not to be worshipped. Paul establishes this well in the epistle to the Hebrews

"Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." (Heb 1:3-4)

"But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?" (Heb 1:13)

These majestic creatures, full of power, able to traverse our world in ways we can only dream of, not restrained by the physical rules of our world, are not to objects of worship

"Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen." (Rom 1:25)

No creature is to be worshipped, only the Creator. The angels themselves are quite clear on this point, and refuse to be worshipped:

"And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God." (Rev 22:8-9)

Paul speaks to this also in his letter to the Colossians

"Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind," (Col 2:18)

It seems there was an issue cropping up in the early churches where they were being seduced with false doctrines related to the angelic host. Jews have long had a rot in

their worship that places an undue and inappropriate emphasis on angels, Gill saying that they came back from Babylon with rote prayers to the 'angels of mercies'. Of course, the great copy-cats of the Jewish form, the Catholic church does the same, claiming that angels can intercede on their behalf and should be prayed to.

This sermon is not any of that. There is no veneration or reverence due the angelic race. There are several things we may learn from their example, and there is respect to be had for them, but they are creatures not creators, servants the same as us.

There are secrets about them which we have no right to know,

“And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour? And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?” (Jdg 13:17-18)

Sometimes, questions aren't to be asked. We must be satisfied with those things we are allowed to know, until such time as we can know more. Now, you might ask, what about Gabriel – Daniel knew his name? And while that is true, it wasn't Gabriel that revealed that piece of information

“And it came to pass, when I, even I Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning, then, behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of Ulai, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision.” (Dan 8:15-16)

Gabriel of course tells Zacharias his name in a form of rebuke at his unbelief

“And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.” (Luk 1:18-20)

I think there is a lesson – don't inquire too deeply into things that don't ultimately matter or guide our obedience. Zacharias had no right to ask for credentials or express the disbelief he did, and Gabriel would have none of it. He has the power to address the rejection of his message, and we would do well to watch our words in light of this. While they are not able to inquire into the contents of our heart, they are clearly at times allowed to address the faults of our lips.

Observation Three: Angels are God's Messengers

The capabilities and qualities angels put on display are put to a particular and focused use as the messengers of God.

The word in the Old Testament translated 'angel' is Strong's 4397, *malach*. It is "from an unused root meaning to despatch as a deputy; a messenger; specifically, of God, i.e. an angel (also a prophet, priest or teacher):—ambassador, angel, king, messenger". In the New Testament it is the Greek word *angelos*, which means "to bring tidings); a messenger, especially an "angel"; by implication a pastor: - angel, messenger".

There are a number of examples of these wonderful creatures delivering messages throughout Scripture

"And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur. And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai. And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands. And the angel of the LORD said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude. And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction." (Gen 16:7-11)

Note here that angels are not just messengers to elect mankind. Hagar was delivered a message, from the Lord, by an angel, regarding her heathen son Ishmael. They are not the judge of the message, its worth, or the recipient. If He says 'go', they go. Notice here the work of angels is not reserved to God's people, though I believe the most important things they do apply to the Elect.

I want you to consider that 'messenger' isn't just a translation; I want you to consider that these words are more than mere definitions or descriptions of how angels behave, they actually describe the function and reason for these creatures to exist; being the messengers of God is their entire purpose. If they aren't operating in His service, they aren't functioning; they're always functioning as they aren't burdened with the limits of and failings of the flesh.

It is important here to note that being a messenger isn't limited to reading some words on a piece of paper to some recipient. The definition of the word doesn't lend itself to the idea that angels just come bearing words. Sometimes their orders are to speak a word to an individual. It is more than that, though, as they are ambassadors. They come in the name of the Lord with orders to execute.

They aren't philosophers or interpreters – they are messengers. They are sent with the message and they go. They are told to do a thing, they do it, without question, without delay and with expediency. All traits we ought to emulate.

Perhaps the greatest message they've ever delivered is this one

“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” (Luk 2:8-14)

The assigned messenger and a host of supporting cast come to deliver that message of the Savior's arrival on earth. They set the recipients at ease and sharply, crisply delivered this vital message with a great plainness of speech. Note that they, who could look upon the creation of man with disdain, despising our sinfulness and rebellion, declare 'good will' toward men. Is that not a charity to emulate?

Observation Four: Angels are administrators of earthly business

Part of the definition of angel is 'ambassador'. Ambassadors do things on behalf of their King or ruler. The more I look at the events outlined in eschatology and see the frequency with which an angel is charged to execute some action in relation to the last days, the more I am convinced this administration is their purpose.

Jacob was given an understanding of this in his dream while on the road to Haran

“And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.” (Gen 28:12)

Here we have a direct explanation of how God's providence is executed in the earth.

Notice that the angels traverse a ladder. This demonstrates that they are not omnipresent. They must go into action when dispatched. They move between their station beneath the throne of God to the earth with one purpose – to execute their orders and deliver their messages, then go straight back. There were angels both ascending and descending, indicating an abundance of activity. There isn't just one angel active in the earth, but multitudes.

Now, I don't think there is a literal ladder somewhere on the planet that angels use to get here onto our plane. The ladder is a similitude for God's providence and ordained events. Using a ladder is an orderly activity. You move up and down one rung at a time. You don't really skip around on a ladder or jump ahead of another person on it.

We don't know all the things or times that angels influence or impact our daily lives, but there are plenty of examples of angels executing the orders of God and causing His providence to be displayed in the earth. Looking at some of these is instructive.

“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Heb 1:14)

This is asked as a rhetorical question as part of Paul's dissertation proving the excellency of Christ to the Jews. Here we see that the elect angels are all ministering spirits, specifically dispatched to minister to God's people.

“He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them.” (Psa 78:49)

This describes how the angels were used in the execution of the plagues of Egypt, especially that plague whereby the firstborn were taken. The expositors all agree that the idea isn't that the Lord used an evil angel to exact this wrath. Rather these were destroying angels, and to any who are at the receiving end of this wrath, they will be seen as evil.

“And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.” (Act 12:6-8)

Here you see the capabilities these spirits have over our physical world. In the middle of a prison an angel suddenly appears, and removes Peter's chains without key or force – they simply fall off his hands.

“And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the

elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces.” (1Ch 21:15-16)

The immediacy of obedience should be seen in this example. An angel sent to destroy and in the process of destroying immediately ceases. There is no argument or discussion, there is only immediate obedience. Where the angel was destroying, he no longer was. This is the behavior we should work hard to emulate. Where

“And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way. But the angel of the LORD stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side. And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he smote her again. And the angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff. And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee. And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay. Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face. And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me: And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive. And Balaam said unto the angel of the LORD, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again. And the angel of the LORD said unto Balaam, Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.” (Num 22:22-35)

This is a prime example of the nature of these creatures. They can make themselves seen by even ‘dumb animals’ and cause them to gain a voice to accomplish their tasks. The nature of our world is no obstacle to them, and we should look to this as a way to encourage us in not letting our flesh be an obstacle to obedience.

“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.” (2Ki 6:15-17)

Here is the example that should resonate and calm our fears when facing the raging, howling mob we so frequently face. This isn't a help reserved for Elisha, this is a help reserved for all God's elect, who will face the raging mob in every age. Noah faced it, Lot faced it, Paul faced it, Christ faced it, we face it.

Fear is a natural response to the rage of the enemy. Being afraid isn't important – how you deal with it is. I suggest to you that the way to quash the fear, when the enemy buffets you, threatens you, is screaming so violently they are spitting on you, is to consider this passage. It's why it is there, I believe. We cannot see the chariots of God about us, but they are there. They are doing battle on our behalf, and they stand ready to execute any orders given. What then, do we have to fear?

Observation Five: Angels are tasked with escorting elect souls at death

The ultimate extension of the administration the angels execute on earth results in a great service and honor to elect men.

“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;” (Luk 16:22)

I remind you that this story in Luke 16 is not a parable, but a statement of fact relayed by Christ to the Pharisees and His disciples. This is an amazing and comforting thing to contemplate when we consider in darker moments the fear of death.

The rich man has honor paid to him throughout his life, and in death he is buried. We know how this looks. We are intimately familiar with the burial of the rich, the pomp and circumstance applied to it, the flash, the fervor, the overabundance of words used to try and justify the evil committed in their lives. We've seen the solemn processions, heard the demands for somber respect to be paid – all to a dead body.

Here is the comfort, perhaps even the excitement we should feel, even if our bodies are dumped unceremoniously in a hole with no reverence or care. Where the rich man has honor paid to his body by other men, the Lazarus's of the world have their spirit carried into the bosom of Abraham. Not the corrupted flesh that oozed with sores and weakness in life, but the spirit is embraced by angels and escorted to their final home.

How weak and tawdry does that flag-draped coffin, that celebrity-delivered eulogy, the moments of silence, all these fleshly 'honors' bestowed upon the dead rich men of our world seem in comparison to an escort of these magnificent spiritual creatures at death? The rich man's money and fineries look like the rags of Lazarus in comparison.

We all face death. We know the wages of sin is death and the flesh decays. But seriously consider this grace the Lord has afforded us. A created race of magnificent spirits who stand in His presence as their normal state, created to aid in the ordering of our affairs are pleased to gently and respectfully bring us to our final state. Consider they are also pleased to share with us – who as sinners have fallen well short of the glory of God – that position of praise and honor at God's throne. Where they, in their glory and obedience are arguably deserving, they are willing to share with those who are not, and indeed escort us to that position.

If that doesn't leave you with a sense of peace and thankfulness toward God, I'm not sure what will.

I hope something here was useful and gave you something to consider.