**Angels and Demons 3. Earthly Enforcers - R. C. Sproul**

Our Father and our God, as we continue our study of the role of angels in redemptive history, we pray that we may be instructed by Thy Word, that we may learn of their significance in the scheme of things, and we ask that You would help us in our understanding. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

We're going to continue now with our look at the role and function of angels in the Scriptures, and when we began this study I mentioned that we can distinguish between the activity of angels as it takes place within heaven, those seraphim who are immediately present around the throne of God, and we've looked at that briefly. And today I want to turn our attention to the way in which angels function with respect to this world and to the created order. In the book of Job we have a reference to the angels as they were present at the time of the creation of the universe as we know it.

So, in chapter 38 of the book of Job, when God is interrogating Job after Job had in some sense of defiance demanded answers from God about his circumstances, and we remember that this chapter begins with a serious rebuke that the Lord gives to Job when he says, Who is this who darkens counsel with words without knowledge? Now gird up yourself like a man, I will question you, and you will answer me. So after Job demands answers from God, God's response is to interrogate Job. And he says to Job, Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding.

Who determined its measurements? Surely you know. Or who stretched the line upon it, and to what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone when the morning star sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Now, here there is an allusion in a poetic discourse to the morning stars singing together with the sons of God. And traditionally, interpreters of the book of Job see the reference to the sons of God who were present during the time of creation as a reference to angels.

And that in itself has provoked a lot of speculation and controversy with respect to that use of the phrase, sons of God. You remember in the early chapters of Genesis, after Cain kills his brother Abel, we get the list of the descendants of Seth, and then the descendants from Cain, and we see this radical expansion of evil, and then we read that the daughters of men intermarried with the sons of God and produced this race of seriously deviant people. And many commentators have taken that text to mean an intermarriage between human women and angelic beings, because they are referred to as the sons of God who married the daughters of men.

I don't take that position, by the way, in that text. I believe that what was involved there was the intermarriage between the descendants of Cain and the descendants of Seth that created the final corruption of the whole race. But we do see that phrase, sons of God or son of God, used in the Bible not only for Christ, not only for godly people, but also for angels.

If we look again at verse 7, we say, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy. It's an interesting poetic image, because it involves the personification of stars, that is, attributing to the stars in the sky personal characteristics, such as singing. And this would say at the earliest stages of creation, when God sets the stars in the sky, that the stars celebrate creation along with the sons of God who shout for joy.

And so the only thing that we get here is that though the Bible nowhere gives us a detailed description of the creation of the angels, we know that the angels were present at some time during creation, and we know that the angels themselves were created beings. And that's important, and it'll become even more important later on when we look at fallen angels and specifically at the biblical concept of Satan, because in our day the tendency is to attribute to Satan divine attributes, where we often forget that Satan is a creature. And even though the angels that we've been examining so far that attend the immediate presence of God and therefore are heavenly beings, they are still heavenly creatures, creatures who were there during the work of creation, the creation of this natural world, but they celebrate that creation as they themselves are creatures.

Now we also see that the angels not only are involved at the time of creation, but we know that after creation God sustains everything that He makes in the order of this world, and that He rules over the created sphere. The laws of nature are His laws, and the outworking of history follows the pattern of His sovereign rule. In a word, we do not believe in an action of creation by which God creates something and then, like the deistic God, steps out of the picture, winds up that clock, and lets it function or run down according to its own internal mechanical operations, but rather the God who creates the universe also sustains that universe.

He keeps it in existence, and He rules over it. And one of the ways in which God mediates His providential supervision and rule over history and over creation is through the mission of these creatures that He created to carry out His will, namely the angels. Now, you see, for example, the first appearance that we have of angels in the Bible is found early in the book of Genesis, apart from the appearance of Satan, who is the fallen angel, and we'll treat him separately, but now we're concentrating our attention on the good angels, the angels who are working with God in His providential care of the world and of history.

We see the strange phenomenon after Adam and Eve fall and are expelled from the Garden of Eden, and they are forced to live east of Eden, and they are not permitted to seek sanctuary or residence back in the Garden of Eden, and though this is an experience that Milton would write of in his classic Paradise Lost, that there may have been strong inclinations of Adam and Eve to seek to regain that Edenic enjoyment of paradise there in the Garden, they were not able to come back into the Garden. Why not? Because God posted a sentry at the entrance to the Garden of Eden, and that sentry who was carrying out God's providential government at that point in history was an angel who was posted there wielding a flaming sword. Now again, this is just a brief mention of the function of a particular angel in the early chapters of Genesis, but it's pregnant with theological significance for our whole understanding of the doctrine of providence.

First of all, we need to see that in that incident where God posted the angel with the flaming sword at the entrance to the Garden of Eden. This is the first representation of government in Scripture in terms of law enforcement officials, so that the first law enforcement officer to be involved in the work of human history was not even a human being, but an angel who was there bearing the sword against potential evil doers. Now that little glimpse of angelic activity there, along with other passages that we'll look at in the ensuing time that we have today, has provoked some fascinating studies about the role of angels in human government.

One of the most respected biblical scholars of the 20th century was a Swiss church historian and biblical scholar by the name of Oskar Kuhlmann. And since most theologians spend little time studying the role and the function of angels in redemptive history, Kuhlmann changed that particular mold and did extensive studies of angels and wrote essays concerning the concept of angel powers in Scripture. The idea being that above earthly government there is a providential rule of each government in the world by angel powers, some of which are good, some of which are evil.

And as the Scriptures tell us that God raises up kingdoms and tears down kingdoms, what Kuhlmann was getting at was that the way in which he raises them up or tears them down is through the mediation of authority and power by angelic beings. And you remember when Paul tells us to put on the whole armor of God in the New Testament, he tells us the reason why we need to be clad with this spiritual armor is because our struggle in this world is not with flesh and blood, but what? With powers and principalities and spiritual wickedness in high places. That's one translation.

Other translations read, or spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies, in the ubernos is the text, that is in the heavenly spheres there are evil powers that have evil influence mediated through powers and principalities, that is earthly governments. And so what Paul is saying is that the people of God need to have the whole armor of God because their struggle is not just against people, but against governments that have been or can be demonized, that standing behind these worldly forces and authority are supernatural powers that for the most part remain invisible to us. But not only do we have these demonic powers involved in world governments where governments can really become empires of evil, but there are also those agents of God for good who are involved in nations and in governments.

And an example of that we'll see by looking if we can at the book of Daniel in chapter 12, verse 1, we read these words, at that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people, and there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered. Now Michael is identified earlier in the book of Daniel as an archangel.

We distinguish levels of authority among the angelic host in Scripture, and the difference between an archangel and an angel is simply a difference in rank and authority. The word arche in Greek is one of the first words that anybody who studies Greek, at least Koine Greek, learns because usually you follow the opening of the Gospel of John as your textbook, and the Gospel of John begins, N-R-K, ein ho logos, that is N-R-K means in the beginning, and the word arche means beginning or chief or ruler. And so though in John 1 it refers to a place in time, the sort of the head of time, the chief of time, the beginning, usually the word is used to refer to that which is in the highest place of authority.

And we use it in the English language. It comes across in the English with the prefix arch. We have enemies, and we have arch enemies.

In fact in football we have rivals, and we have arch rivals. In the church we have bishops, and we have arch bishops. In construction we have builders, and we have architects, and that word means chief builder.

That's what an architect is. And so on, we see that word frequently used in the English language. Well, it's also functioning that way in the Greek, and we can distinguish between an angel and an archangel.

Or we can distinguish between a heretic and a heresiarch. A heresiarch is an arch heretic, a really bad heretic. And so the angels who are archangels are those who are commanders of the archangels.

And of the heavenly host, who are seated in the position of supreme authority. Again, not of those who are attending the immediate presence of God, but who are the agents of God to exercise God's rule and God's authority over creation. And one of those who is named in Scripture is Michael, who appears here in the book of Daniel to be the angelic manifestation of the power of God to redeem his nation.

Also, Gabriel is so understood in biblical history as an archangel, and we will look at his activity later on as he serves as the chief messenger of God in Scripture. Also, we see that the angels that we encounter in the Old Testament particularly, often manifest themselves in human form. Let's take an example of that that we find in Genesis in chapter 18.

There is in verse 1 this text, the Lord appeared to him, that is to Abraham by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. And he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing by him. And when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, My Lord, if I now have found favor in your sight, do not pass on by your servant now.

There's something a little difficult here. Angels are not to be worshiped, and yet the response of Abraham to these three who come to him by the oaks of Mamre is a response of worship. He's on his face and doing a base before them, which causes many commentators to believe that what you have here are two regular angels plus the angel of the Lord, who is so closely connected with God that he wears, as it were, the very mantle of God, and can be seen as either a theophany or as a Christophany, that is as a outward manifestation of God himself or as an outward manifestation of the pre-incarnate Christ.

Many people believe that Melchizedek was really Christ appearing in the Old Testament in human form under the guise of Melchizedek, and the commander of the Lord of hosts in Joshua is also often seen as a Christophany in the Old Testament. But in any case, we find these three who appear here in Genesis to consult with Abram, and Abram said, My Lord, if I've found favor, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, wash your feet, rest yourselves under the tree.

I will bring a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourself. And so then they go on, and they have this conversation, and Abraham is interceding for the future of Sodom, and we are aware of that story. Then in chapter 9, verse 1, we say, Now the two angels, that presumably are the two angels without the angel of the Lord of hosts, came to Sodom, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom.

And when Lot saw them, he rose to meet them. He bowed himself with his face toward the ground, and he said, Here now, my lords, please turn into your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way.

And they said, No, we'll spend the night in the open square. But he insisted strongly, so they turned into him and entered his house. He made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

Now before they lay down, we read, that the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot and said, Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out that we may know them carnally. That these angels were so magnificently attractive that the Sodomites sought to use them sexually.

And this is the story that takes place where Lot, trying to protect the angels, offers his daughters instead. And they'll have none of that. But what's significant for our concern is this.

They said in verse 9, Stand back. And they said, This one came in to stay here, and he keeps acting as a judge. We will deal worse with you than with them.

So they pressed hard against Lot, came near to break down the door. But the men reached out their hands, pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. And they struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great.

So they became weary trying to find the door. So these angels, who are supposed to receive biblical hospitality in the house of Lot, intercede to save Lot's life and his family, pulling him away from the mob in the safety in the house, and then using their powers to strike these wicked Sodomites blind. And so in this case, the angels are there to minister to Lot and to his family in a time of great crisis.

And that's a key we want to hold on to for future consideration, because that also is one of the functions of the angels that God sends to work out His providential rule over history.