**Angels and Demons 4. Angels as Ministers - R. C. Sproul**

One of my favorite angel narratives in all of Scripture is one found in the second book of Kings, and I enjoy this particular narrative because it reveals directly and indirectly so many things that we need to understand about the nature and function of angels. So let's take a few moments to look at this narrative that takes place during the life of the prophet Elisha in 2nd Kings beginning in verse 8. Here's the text, 2nd Kings chapter 6 beginning at verse 8. Now the king of Syria was making war against Israel, and he consulted with his servants saying, My camp will be in such and such a place. And the man of God sent to the king of Israel saying, Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are coming down there.

So the king of Israel sent someone to the place of which the man of God had told him. And thus he warned him, and he was watchful there, not just once or twice. Now you see here what the king of Syria is trying to do is to plan an ambush against the king of Israel.

But somehow all of the secret plans that the king of Syria is making are told to the king of Israel so that he avoids the trap. So we read in verse 11, Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing, and he called his servants and said to them, Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel? He automatically assumes that he has a spy in the camp, and so he inquires of that. And one of the servants said, None, my lord, O king, but Elisha the prophet who is in Israel tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom.

So he said, Go and see where he is that I may send and get him. And it was told him, saying, Surely he is in Dothan. So you get the picture.

King of Syria finds out, and it's not one of his men that's betraying him, but supernaturally his plans are being communicated by the prophet Elisha to the king of Israel. And so now the king of Syria changes his plan. If I'm ever going to be effective in capturing the king of Israel, first thing I've got to do is get rid of this Elisha.

So he inquires as to where Elisha is staying, and he's told that Elisha is in Dothan. So he sets about to execute his plan to capture Elisha. So we read in verse 14, Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city.

And when the servant of the man of God rose early and went out, there was an army surrounding the city with the horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, Alas, my master, what shall we do? So here Elisha goes to sleep in this little place in Dothan. His servant gets up first in the morning, goes to open the blinds and the curtains and let the light in.

He looks out one side of the room, sees all these chariots and soldiers of the Syrians. He goes to the other side of the house, sees nothing but chariots, and he goes to the front and goes to the back. You know, it reminds me of the story of Tano and the Lone Ranger being surrounded by Indians on every side.

And the Lone Ranger says to Tano, What do we do now? And Tano says, What do you mean we, you white man? And so that's kind of what I picture here when Elisha's servant sees this army surrounding this little house they're in. So he runs up and he wakes up Elisha and he tells him of the situation, the predicament. He says, We're surrounded on every side by chariots and armies.

What are we going to do? And listen to Elisha's response. So he answered, Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. Now, if we can read between the lines here, obviously Elisha's servant is completely flabbergasted by Elisha's response.

You don't get it, boss, you know. I just told you, there are countless soldiers and chariots around us. And look around, Elisha, there's you and there's me.

What do you mean that those who are with us are more than those who are with them? And so Elisha prays. And he said, Lord, I pray, 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 all around Elisha. So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the Lord and said, Strike these people, I pray, with blindness. And he struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

Now, as I said, there's so many things that we learn from this particular passage. One has to do with an ongoing controversy among theologians in the history of the church, because when Jesus mentions in the New Testament to his disciples not to forbid little children to come, he says, for as such, you know, belong to the kingdom of God, and he later on goes on to say that, behold, their angels are watching over them in heaven. And the idea that was extrapolated from that statement of our Lord was that every person in the kingdom, every Christian, has a guardian angel assigned to him or to her to take care of them.

Because, again, as we will see a little bit later, that the author of Hebrews tells us that the primary function of angels in terms of this world is to minister to God's people. And so, as I say, there is a strong tradition in church history that every person has a particular angel assigned to them, sort of like it's a wonderful life, and every time you hear the tinkle of the bell, and angels get in their wings and that sort of thing. But here, what we find in this story is there's not one angel watching out for Elisha, but the whole heavenly host is mobilized to defend him in his critical hour of need.

Now, we see the same thing in the New Testament with respect to the multitudes of angels that attend the ministry of Jesus, and we'll look at that a little bit later. But for now, let's see that here we have multitudes of angels sent to intercede in behalf of Elisha. Now, at the very beginning of this series, I told the story of the rescue of miners that were underground for several days, and how they testified that they had been ministered to by angels, and that's how they explained their survival.

You'll remember that story that I told you, and how the press automatically assumed that they were hallucinating. And the assumption in the secular worldview in which we live is that anybody who sees an angel by definition must be subject to hallucinations. And a hallucination occurs when somebody sees things that aren't really there.

And I mentioned Rudolf Bultmann was saying that you can't live in our sophisticated society and still be believing in ghosts and goblins and things that go bump in the night, and in invisible realities such as angels. But at the heart of Judeo-Christianity is an uncompromised supernaturalism that says that there is much more to reality than meets the eye, that God Himself is invisible, and yet there's nothing more central to Christianity than the reality of the existence of God, and the thing that makes it so difficult for us to be faithful, I believe, to God is because He's invisible. And it's hard to worship that which you do not see and obey one with whom you've never spoken and so on.

But the same thing may be true of angels. They're invisible most of the time. There are times throughout biblical history as we read in the case of the visitors to Sodom and elsewhere when the angels manifest themselves, usually in human garb, but under ordinary circumstances they are spirit beings, they're real, they're creatures, they're spirit beings who are invisible.

And if we really do believe in the message of the Christian faith, we have to understand this as part and parcel of that message, that the reality in which we live contains much more than meets the eye. Now that should not be that much of a stretch to us living on this side of the Enlightenment, living on this side of the invention of the telescope, living on this side of the invention of the microscope, because the scientific revolution of the modern era took place when our perception of reality was increased and enhanced by instruments that enabled us to see things that could not be seen by the naked eye. You know, one of the crises in the time of Galileo was the scientist of his day, as well as the bishop of his day, refused to put their eye on the telescope because they didn't want to believe the evidence that the telescope was revealing about how the heavens really are structured and how the orbits of the planets and so on really take place.

And the whole revolution that we call the Copernican Revolution was a revolution in science that was provoked by a sudden ability to see what previously was unseen. And if that revolution take place with the telescope, how much more the revolution that has taken place in our lifetimes even with the microscope microbiology. That there are in this room as I speak enough real entities to destroy each one of us, to destroy our souls.

That if we could see them with the naked eye, would probably strike terror into our souls. But fortunately for us, we go along our merry way, completely oblivious to the myriad micro-bodies that have the capacity to kill us. If we could see them all, we'd probably stay in bed hiding under the covers for the rest of our lives.

But we have learned through modern science that there are realities out there beyond the scope of our ability to perceive them. Now, why is it that we believe that germs that we can't see can be out there, but we have this bias that says you can't have supernatural heavenly beings, spirit beings like angels when the Scripture texts are full of them. That's one of the things that I love about this story, is the servant couldn't see what was really there until Elisha prayed and said, please, Lord, open his eyes.

Let him see. Not let him see a hallucination. Not let him see a vision of what's not real.

Let him see what's really out there. And when he opened his eyes, whoo, the assembled host of angels was vastly superior in number and power to all of those chariots and armies of the king of Syria. And that's what God tells us is the world in which we live.

You know, a similar incident that I think is revealing takes place in the New Testament. And it takes place, ironically, during the temptation of Jesus. Immediately after Jesus' baptism, the Spirit drives him into the Judean wilderness to be tempted of Satan.

And you know that how Satan comes and he suggests that maybe Jesus really isn't the Son of God, even though the last words that Jesus had heard in his ears before he goes into the wilderness was the pronouncement from heaven, this is my beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased. And so Satan comes to him just like he came to Adam, you know, basically did God say, you know, if you're the Son of God, you're hungry, turn these stones into bread. And that was the first temptation when Jesus responds by saying, man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

I'm involved in a fast here, I'm involved in a test, I'm sorry Mr. Satan, but I'm not going to turn those stones into bread. I can do it, but I don't have the permission of my Father to do it, so get away from me. And he quotes Scripture to Satan.

Now, Satan, in the midst of this temptation, starts to quote Scripture back to Jesus, when he says, let me take you to the pinnacle of the temple and throw yourself down from the temple, because the Scriptures say that God will give his angels charge over you lest you dash your foot against the stone. So let's see if it's true. Let's see if you really are the Son of God.

Let's get up to the pinnacle of the temple and take a swan dive and see if the angels catch you. And Jesus had to correct the devil's hermeneutic and say, yeah, the Bible says that, but you have to interpret Scripture by Scripture, and you can't set up Scripture against Scripture because the Bible also says, thou shalt not tempt the Lord your God. So thank you very much.

I'm not going to do that. And so when the temptations are finished, we are told almost as a concluding unscientific footnote, that after Satan departed from Jesus for a season, what's the very next thing that happened? The angels came and ministered to Jesus. They were there all the time.

It makes you wonder if he could see them like Elisha could. But God had given his angels charge over him. And the angels came to him in the midst of that crisis experience in his life.

Immediately after the fallen angel departs, the heavenly hosts come and they minister to Jesus. And it's significant that this host of angels attend Jesus again and again throughout his lifetime. Not only at the announcement of his birth, which we will look at separately, but also at the time of his resurrection when the disciples come, and when the ladies come, there are the angels in the garden, one at the head, one at the foot, you know, saying, the one that you seek is not here, he's risen, he's gone into Galilee before you.

And the angels of God, who are performing the function of messengers, of course, at that point, at the same time are sentinels in the tomb. They're guarding the body of Christ. Probably the most tender activity that the angels ever engaged in, in all of redemptive history, because God had ordained that his Holy One would not suffer corruption.

And so he appoints the angels to be at the tomb. The angels are the escorts of Christ when he ascends into heaven. When he goes to his enthronement for his coronation as the King of Kings.

He declares that when he returns, the end of the age, he will be accompanied by the heavenly host. That same heavenly host that were present in the fields of Bethlehem when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Again, I have to say to you, I don't know how you are, but when I think of the events that transpired during the life of Jesus, and then how the disciples, at least some of them, were eyewitnesses of almost every one of them, I ask myself, if I could have been an eyewitness of any event in the life of Jesus, what one would I choose? What one would I really like to have seen with my own eyes? And that's really a hard one.

I mean, obviously, I would just be delighted to witness a resurrection. Who wouldn't? That would be fantastic. But it's hard for me to choose between the resurrection and the transfiguration.

To see that bursting forth of the glory of Christ through the veil of his humanity where his countenance was changed, that would have been incredible. And the disciples never did get over that. They kept talking about, we beheld his glory.

But one of the ones that I really savor, one of the ones, I just, my imagination runs wild with me, and it's because I've been over there. And I remember the time we went to Bethlehem, and we went to the church there of the nativity and so on, and they were going through all of the spiel inside the church and all of that and the guided tour, and I was not really turned on by that, and I left the company of those who were going through the tour and walked out by myself out to the edge of the church, and they had this little stone, primitive stone wall. And I went out and sat on that stone wall, and it looks out onto this vast, flat plain that were the fields of Bethlehem, and I just let my imagination run wild.

But I sat there and I said, imagine that night of pitch dark, a little campfire maybe, bursting through the darkness, these peasants sitting around there trying to keep warm, trying to watch over their flocks, and all heaven breaks loose with the glory of God shining round about as the heavenly hosts begin to sing of the birth of Christ. Oh, if I would have seen that, I would have said like Simeon, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace. I've seen all I ever need to see.

That is fantastic. But the angels are present in the moments not only of the suffering of Christ, but in his glory. They attend him in the manifestation of his glory and of his exultation, which are the things that the great saints of the ages would have loved to peer into, but have been given only to a few in church history.

And so, since the angels manifest the glory of God, only when the glory of God is eclipsed in a culture and in the church that angels are dismissed as insignificant. But where the glory of God is honored, and the glory and exultation of Christ is upheld, we see attending those moments in the past and in the future, the heavenly hosts who serve as an escort for the King.