

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## The Ministry of Angels

*And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God; Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision. (Daniel 9:20-23)*

We've all likely encountered folks who thoughtlessly embrace the superstitious notion that angels are actually departed children of God; you die and become an angel. Scripture offers no support for such an idea. Scripture defines angels as follows:

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

This verse concludes perhaps the most extensive Bible discussion of angels and their divinely assigned role. Its conclusion is that Jesus is better than angels, as He is also better than all other creatures. He is God, eternal and uncreated.

As we read Daniel's inspired "diary," we struggle to see the man's sins, but Daniel saw them and readily confessed them to God. Confession of our sins to God, along with a sincere prayer for God's forgiveness, motivates us to be more open about dealing with them, including confession and seeking forgiveness from our brothers and sisters in Christ. The person who carefully persists in pointing out the sins of the saints often is not so careful about revealing his/her own sins. As in so many other points, Daniel serves as a noble and godly example in this conduct.

I find it enlightening that the angel appeared to Daniel in the midst of his confession and prayer. Perhaps if we were more willing to confess our sins and talk to God about them, we'd see more of His angels and their ministry in our lives. Transparent prayer and confession seems far more conducive to angelic ministry than denial and rebellion. Oh, we should not doubt; denial and rebellion may well bring about the appearance of angels, but in this case their "ministry" is to resist, not assist us.

If we incorporate the point made in Hebrews 1:14 into our study passage, Gabriel appeared to minister to Daniel at a time when the prophet was distressed about his beloved people and their future.

Tom Constable quotes from Gleason Archer regarding this angelic appearance.

"Note that the term *ha'is* ('the man') does not signify 'man' in contradistinction to angels or other spiritual powers residing in heaven; that would have been *'adam* or *'enos* in Hebrew. It rather indicates that this mighty archangel had appeared in a humanlike form and had spoken to Daniel intelligibly as one man spoken to another [cf. Luke 24:4; Acts 1:10]."<sup>1</sup>

Typically in Scripture angels appear in the form of a man, not in the form of a winged being. The human appearance of angels adds one more example to the many Biblical occasions in which God condescends to reveal His heavenly truths to His people in ways and forms that we may most easily grasp.

*I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding.* Have you ever faced a particularly difficult challenge, one that surpassed your personal abilities, only to find a solution that both amazed you and fully resolved your problem? You clearly felt that the solution was beyond you. Did you consider that you may well have been blessed by the ministry of one of God's angels?

John Gill emphasizes the gracious disposition of our God toward His children's prayers in his commentary on this lesson.

<sup>1</sup>Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003), Da 9:20.

**At the beginning of thy supplications...** As soon as ever he began to pray. This circumstance shows how ready the Lord is to hear the prayers of his people; and yet it was not owing to the prayers of the prophet, and to any intrinsic virtue or merit in them that the Lord did what he afterwards declares should be done; and, besides, more is revealed and promised than Daniel asked for...<sup>2</sup>

When my three daughters were quite young, I was heavily involved in my career, along with trying, at times quite ineffectively, to be involved in their lives, as well as to be a good husband and pastor. I felt incredibly stretched. I developed the habit of arising quite early in the morning and spending at least a couple of hours each day in quiet Bible study and meditation. On one particular morning, all alone with my Bible and my coffee in the family room, I read the first chapter of Hebrews and began a fruitful meditation on the work of angels. The thought occurred to me; how would I react if I were to see one of God's angels standing before me? No, I didn't suddenly see an image, but as I thought about the idea, my spine tingled. How would I react if I were actually to see one of these noble creatures standing before me? Not only did Daniel see Gabriel; the angel "touched" him. Would that ever get your attention?

At times people puzzle over the role of angels. God is omnipotent and omnipresent. How do we distinguish between His personal intervention and the work of an angel sent by Him? Why does He bother with angels anyway? Why not just do it all Himself? We overlook the simple and the obvious. He does minister to us quite personally, but He chooses on occasion to do so through the ministry of His angels, just as He often chooses to minister to His people through the ministry of preachers and other faithful believers to whom He gives the charge, "Feed my sheep...Feed my lambs." (John 21:15-17)

*At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth...* Apparently there was a delay between the divine direction to Gabriel and his appearance to Daniel. However, when God sends an angel to minister to us, that divine minister is always on time.

*...for thou art greatly beloved...* God doesn't send His angels to minister to the wicked; look back to Hebrews 1:14. He sends them to minister to "...them who shall be heirs of salvation."

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<sup>2</sup> From John Gill's commentary on the whole Bible, copied from the electronic version of this work in SwordSearcher Bible study software.

*...therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.* Gabriel is preparing Daniel to understand more of his burden and vision. In fact Gabriel's explanation will frame one of the most unique and specific divine prophecies to be found in the Bible. Bible scholars indicate that the Old Testament contains around two hundred fifty or more specific prophecies regarding the Incarnation, God's coming in human form to accomplish our eternal redemption and to transform the form and mode of worship that His people would observe from His appearance till the Second Coming. No other Old Testament prophecy focuses so clearly and specifically on the precise time when Jesus would come as does the prophecy that Gabriel reveals to Daniel.

Does God answer prayer? Do prayers alter God's providential dealings with His people? Sometimes we confuse God's immutability, a divine attribute, with God's providential blessings toward His people. This confusion leads us to question; if prayer alters God's providence, would this conclusion not make God mutable, changeable and thus compromise an essential divine attribute? The simple answer is no. Just as God reveals in Scripture that in His divine nature He is immutable, He equally reveals in Scripture that He is sensitive and responsive to the prayers of His children. The Bible is full of examples in which prayer brought God's intervention and blessing upon His children. God does not rule His children's lives by robotic decree, but by a tender and sensitive interaction with them that invites and encourages our prayers to Him. If God did not respond to our prayers, we would have no basis either logically or from Scripture to pray in the first place. And, no, He does not decree our prayers effectually and irresistibly so that we never pray for anything other than what He intended to do anyway.

This lesson affirms what we see consistently throughout the Bible regarding God's tender presence in the lives of His beloved children. What problems do you face in your life today? What insurmountable challenges leave you staggering? Follow Daniel's example. Start with a sincere confession of your personal sins to God. Plead for His forgiveness. Then ask for His help, His intervention to relieve your burden. The greatest blessings in life often appear as God surprises us with grace. Are you ready for a glorious exclamation point, a "grace surprise"?

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Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor