

Podcast Episode 19: Angels, Part 1

QUESTION: What are Angels like, how do we interact with them, what are they here to do, and how are they different from us and from other heavenly beings?

DENVER: One of the things that Joseph talked about in the Nauvoo era was about how angels sometimes have a hard time visiting with men because they stink and that we really ought to clean ourselves up because we'll offend the sensibilities of the angels. There's a notion for you.

It was intended to be a gathering-- I mean that the little seed grows up into the great mustard plant into which the birds (or as Joseph put it, the angels) were intended to come and watch. It was intended to be a super structure for housing contact between the Divine and the mortal. It was intended to be the moment of intersection between all that is in eternity and the life of the mortal. It was intended to be the journey into the Holy of Holies, into the presence of God.

The temple was designed to lead you to the presence of the Lord. The presence of the Lord is intended to bring you to the presence of the Father. And the purpose of bringing you to the presence of the Father is to have you clean every whit. Because when there is a group of people with whom it is possible for the angels to dwell, there will no longer be any reason for angels to stay aloof. There will be no reason for the Lord to delay the bringing of Zion, because the Lord is going to dwell there. One of the definitions of Zion, when you get past having all things in common, is the fact that the Lord will dwell there.

“For he that receiveth my servants receiveth me” (D&C 93:36). I want to suggest that throughout scripture, almost invariably, the word "servants" is referring to angelic ministrants. And so angels minister (that would be Aaronic), and then Christ ministers (that would be sons of Moses). *“And he that receiveth me receiveth my Father”* (verse 37), because it is the purpose of the Son to bear record of the Father. It is the purpose of the Son to bring others to the Father so that there might be many sons of God. *“And he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father's kingdom”* (verse 38).

If you have read the tenth parable (*Ten Parables*, Denver C. Snuffer), the thing which caused the stirring to begin was the notice the angels took that here on the ground, on the earth, there was something that looked like Heaven. There was a man and a woman whose experience and circumstances mirrored the same kind of thing that the angels who were watching recognized

from where they come from. And they went, and they got the Lord, and the Lord came, and He evaluated, and He said, “We’re going to save this one. Here’s the to-do list. Now get busy.”

Begin at verse 8 of chapter 22: *“Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.”* The parable starts with the Lord (who’s trying to get people to come to the wedding) telling the servants, “The wedding is ready, but those that I’ve asked are not worthy.” *“Go into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid [them] to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways....”* Always the servants, always angels do this work-- they do the gathering *“...and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there was a man which had not a wedding garment: ...saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king, Bind him hand and foot, take him away, cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, [wailing], gnashing of teeth”* (Matthew 22:8-13).

So I want to put that on the table. Because in this part of this parable, you have anyone who will come being invited, because the people who were targeted for attendance simply aren't worthy to come. So anyone gets to come. And now you have among them someone who doesn't have on a wedding garment. And for that I want to refer you to Luke chapter 15, because in Luke chapter 15, we run into the Lord talking about a robe being supplied. This the son who found himself having been in a far-off land, filling his belly *“...with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.”* He comes to himself, says, *“How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!”* So when he goes back to see his father, look at what happens in verse 22 of Luke chapter 15: *“But the father said to his servants....”* Again, it's the angels that do this, *“Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet....”*

You see, this I think has to be kept in mind-- whenever you're looking at someone who has arrived at the feast, bidden from the highway, who arrives and doesn't have on the robe, the Master is the one that wants you to wear it. The Master is one that will furnish it. Don't think that the purpose of the Lord is to judge. The purpose of the Lord is to redeem, and for that purpose, He is infinitely patient and willing, if you will respond, with forgiveness of your sins, as He does consistently throughout the *Book of Mormon*.

There is this net that has been cast out to gather together all manner of fish. But as the Lord tells the parable, the angels are going to come, and they're going to pick through all manner of fish, and they're going to keep the good, and the rest are going to be scheduled for burning (Matthew 13: 47-50). And so the question is, how diligent ought the search be into the things of God? How carefully ought we to consider the things that have been restored to us through the Prophet

Joseph Smith? Well, they who come will burn up those who are unprepared. And therefore, what should we be doing in order to make sure that we are included among those who are prepared?

And there is no reason to expect that you can take people and gather them and then try to produce Zion. It makes a whole lot more sense, as the scriptures seem to indicate, that first, people are taught repentance. And then some few repent. Then they are gathered-- one of a city, two of a family. Then they are gathered, and they are gathered by those who are the angels to whom the keys are entrusted to do that gathering. Then you put them together.

“And through the whole history of the scheme of life and salvation, it is a matter of faith: every man received according to his faith-- according as his faith was, so were his blessings and privileges; and nothing was withheld from him when his faith was sufficient to receive it” (Lectures on Faith 7:17). This is the way in which God is no respecter of persons. This is the way in which you, if you will lay down your ignorance, if you will repent and turn to God-- this is the way in which you can find yourself also the inheritor of blessings and privileges which God will not withhold from anyone who understands and gathers to themselves the light in the truth that comes through obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“By their faith they could obtain heavenly visions, the ministering of angels, have knowledge of the spirits of just men made perfect, of the general assembly and church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven, of God the judge of all, of Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and become familiar with the third heavens, see and hear things which were not only unutterable, but were unlawful to utter” (Lectures on Faith 7:17).

Later Joseph Smith made a comment about, “Paul said he knew a man who was caught up to the third heaven, but I know a man who was caught up to the seventh heaven.” It is sufficient however, if you commune with those beings.

Skipping then over verses 9-11, I’m going to go to beginning at verse 28: *“And after God had appointed that these things should come unto man, behold, then he saw that it was expedient that man should know concerning the things whereof he had appointed unto them.”* He wants us to know. The glory of God is intelligence, or in other words, light and truth, which is knowledge of things. He wants us to know these things. *“Therefore [because this is God's desire] he sent angels to converse with them, who [this is the angels] caused men to behold of his [God's] glory”* (Alma 12:28-29).

So the office of the angels is to educate and to prepare and then to cause man, who receive and entertain the angels, to then behold the glory of God-- the glory of God being intelligence, or in other words light and truth. Ultimately, the greatest truth is God Himself. And if you entertain

angels and if the angels instruct you and if you have been in their presence, you acquire from them the strength, the fortification, the knowledge (or in other words, the ordination) by which you are able to go on and pass by them (because they surely are sentinels) and enter into the glory of the Lord. And so, if you will give heed to the process, it really should not matter that you are left in a dispensation in which the only authority gives you the ministering of angels. Because the ministering of angels is sufficient to bring you into the glory of God, if you will receive them, if you will give heed to them. That's the office of their ministry. That's what they're responsible to do.

"And they began from that time forth to call on his name; therefore God conversed with men" (verse 30). It's part of the title to the first book I wrote, *Conversing With the Lord Through the Veil*. That's the object. That's what the "lesser priesthood" can equip you to accomplish, left behind with nothing but a relic.

And what did Joseph say about all of the prophets of the Old Testament? He said they all held Melchizedek priesthood, and they were all ordained by God Himself. Because they functioned inside a society that was defective, limited, excluded from the presence of God. But not those who received and entertained angels. They were brought up to where they need to be, and God Himself ordained them. Should you not have hope? Should you not rise up above the level of those who are content to have less? Should you not be willing to mount up on that fiery mountain? Despite the thunderings and lightnings, despite the earthquakes, despite the fact that you do not believe yourself to be worthy, you're still capable of coming aboard.

Look at Moroni chapter 7, beginning at verse 29: *"Because he hath done this, my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased? Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men. For behold, they [the angels] are subject unto him, to minister according to the word of his command, showing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness. And the office of their ministry is to call men to repentance [REPENTANCE!] to fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of the Father...."* (verses 29-31). Because when you move from repentance, you move into covenants, which is why this process has been undergoing for the last year, unfolding how you get back into the presence of God. Because it surely is necessary for there to be a rescue mission, and the rescue mission is designed to raise you, to elevate you, to redeem you.

"...the work of the covenants of the Father, which he hath made unto the children of men, to prepare the way among the children of men, by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him. And by so doing, the Lord God prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ, that the Holy Ghost may

have place in their hearts, according to the power thereof; and after this manner bringeth to pass the Father, the covenants which he hath made unto the children of men" (Moroni 7:31-32).

In a word, those who receive and entertain angels have an obligation, then, to declare the words so that others might, likewise, have faith in Him. That word having been declared unto you, gives you the hope, the faith, the confidence that you, likewise, can do so. So that the covenants that are made by the Father can be brought to pass.

"Therefore, sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, it shall be in his own time, and in his own way, according to his own will" (D&C 88:68). He, and not you, control that.

Many of those to whom these promises are made will receive the vindication of the promise in the last moments of their life. Alvin, as he lay dying, had angels come minister to him. Joseph would later see him in the celestial kingdom, but it was in the throes of death when angels ministered to Brother Alvin.

Stephen, when he was being stoned, had the heavens opened to him. In the last moments of his life, suffering a brutal form of execution, he's praying because he's so filled with the Spirit by what he's beholding, having the heavens opened to him, that he's praying for those who were in the process of killing him.

St. Francis of Assisi, living in an apostate era, in an apostate church, believed and followed the Sermon on the Mount. His heart was pure, and as the last month of St. Francis' life drew to a close, angels came and ministered to him. Our idea of what it takes to be pure before God is not the same thing as God's view of what it takes to be pure before Him.

Turn to Luke chapter 18, because there the Lord pretty much tells you how it is He evaluates whether someone has purified themselves before Him. This is a story that the Lord makes up in chapter 18 of Luke, telling a parable to those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous.

Beginning at verse 10: *"Two men went into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:10-14).*

God can only exalt the meek because only the meek can be trusted. This is what it means to sanctify yourself. Our idea of purity and Christ's idea are entirely based on different criteria.

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased because Christ hath ascended into heaven, and hath sat down on the right hand of God, to claim of the Father his rights of mercy which he hath upon the children of men? For he hath answered the ends of the law, and he claimeth all those who have faith in him; and they who have faith in him will cleave unto every good thing; wherefore he advocateth the cause of the children of men; and he dwelleth eternally in the heavens. And because he hath done this, my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased? Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men. For behold, they are subject unto him, to minister according to the word of his command, showing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness. And the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance, and to fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of the Father, which he hath made unto the children of men... And by so doing, the Lord God prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ... And Christ hath said: If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me. And he hath said: Repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and have faith in me, that ye may be saved. And now, my beloved brethren, if this be the case that these things are true which I have spoken unto you, and God will show unto you, with power and great glory at the last day, that they are true, and if they are true has the day of miracles ceased? Or have angels ceased to appear unto the children of men? Or has he withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them? Or will he, so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved? Behold I say unto you, Nay; for it is by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men; wherefore, if these things have ceased wo be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief, and all is vain. For no man can be saved, according to the words of Christ, save they shall have faith in his name; wherefore, if these things have ceased, then has faith ceased also; and awful is the state of man, for they are as though there had been no redemption made” (Moroni 7:27-38).

Moroni discussed the ministering of angels. And if you go through those verses and you look at what he’s saying, it requires a “firm mind in every form of godliness.” A firm mind can be descriptive of a variety of things including someone that’s just stubborn. But it’s not stubbornness; it’s a firm grasp on the things that lead to godliness-- not excesses, not foolishness. But their purpose in ministering is to equip the person who has an audience, and those who hear the message, to be called to repentance; not a lot of flowery, fancy things but repentance. Because essentially, without repentance-- that is turning to face God in all you do-- none of us

are going to make it. But he goes on to say that the purpose of calling people to repentance is to “*fulfil and do the works of the covenants*” (Moroni 7:31).

There is sort of a pattern here in what is happening. Angelic ministrants come to people of a firm mind in every form of godliness, call repentance in order to fulfil and in order to do the work of the covenants. “*To fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of the Father,*” and that requires that people bear testimony of Him. These are the essential things that are needed. It doesn’t require a fanciful or a flowery imagination. It does not require that we bear testimony of ourselves. It doesn’t require us to do something other than to fulfil and do the work of the covenants. Therefore, I would suggest this is a pretty good guide to consider when you’re evaluating all of the competing claims that are now being made by people, to having inspiration or revelation or the word of God to them.

Salvation is a mortal challenge. Whether or not we’re saved depends upon what we do. We don’t have angels running around fixing all our errors. We have no immortals that are going to come to our rescue, except for the Second Coming of course, to destroy the wicked and to visit with those who are wheat. But the best way to understand it is, once the lifetime of the three Nephite disciples who asked to tarry on the earth ended, the way they continued their ministry was to minister to prophets-- mortals-- and then the mortals ministered to others. They came, and they visited with Mormon, for example, but the people to whom Mormon ministered didn’t see them. They ministered to Moroni, but those to whom Moroni ministered didn’t see them. They become as a ministering angel, and the ministering of angels is predicated upon the faithfulness of people.

I mean, you can read about how the system of salvation works-- it’s in Alma. Angels minister to those who are supposed to then preach salvation to others, in order to inform them about the conditions that are needed to be met for the salvation of others. John the Beloved has become a ministering angel, and he has a ministry. And there are those people who expect them to step out in public and to do what people of flesh and blood are obligated to do. Well, that’s kind of unfair to that generation, and an apology will be owed to every other generation if the angels suddenly assume the obligation to accomplish things which from the days of Adam had been primarily the obligation of mortals to accomplish, with some to whom angels minister, ministering to others.

You know, I was raised by a Baptist mother and got Bible verses read at me every morning before I went to school throughout childhood. When Mormon missionaries came and told me about the Joseph Smith story, and when Mormon missionaries assured me that Joseph saw God, and that if you follow James 1:5 and you ask God, He’ll give you an answer; and if you will pray about the *Book of Mormon*, God will make it known to you whether it’s true or not-- I accepted that. I was young still, I was still a teenager, but I accepted that as literal. I accepted that as

possible. I had faith that that could happen. I'm not a theologian. I do believe God not only talks in sentences but can make Himself known to man, literally. I believe all that. I believe that God did appear to Joseph. I believe that He did appear to Isaiah. Having that understanding, I did not think there was anything unusual when an angel appeared to me, because an angel did appear to me.

This much I know: The angel said, "On the first day of the third month in nine years, your ministry will begin, and so you must prepare." Those are the words. I can quote them still. He spoke; he spoke in a sentence.

The Lord has never appeared to me in a dream. I have always been awake, fully aware of my surroundings, and with my senses unimpeded. When awakened during the night, sleep has always fled, and following such an encounter I was always unable to return to sleep. The Lord does everything according to His higher way of teaching. By beginning with a vision of His return, He set out the foundation for understanding His course, which is one eternal round. Since His first appearance, He has sent divers angels from Adam, or Michael, to Hyrum and Joseph Smith, giving line upon line, to confirm my hope in Christ.

When Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt, and Egypt had a thorough knowledge of information that they had preserved that came down from an imitation from the beginning, one of the things that they have-- if you look at Facsimile #1, underneath the lion couch-- are these four idolatrous gods that have their angelic counterparts in Daniel and the Book of Revelation, and this is an echo of a truth. There's four great angels who preside over four corners of the earth. And they're showing up here, but they're called idolatrous gods. They appear in various forms-- that they're the four sons of Horus, they're the four elements of the four cardinal directions, they're the four guardians-- the point is that in this context, they are idolatrous. And the Egyptians had no hesitation about petitioning, praying to, and asking for guidance from the guardians, the sons of Horus, the angels.

If you look at verse 13 of [D&C] 132, we are warned that "*everything that is in the world, whether it be ordained of men,*" and then we get this language: "*...by thrones, or principalities, or powers, or things of name, whatsoever they may be, that are not by me or by my word, saith the Lord, shall be thrown down....*" This language he's using about "thrones, principalities, powers or things of name" is a reference not to what men do; it's a reference to what the angels do. Angels are, in fact, actual authoritative custodians along the way. But at the end of the day, I don't care who the angel is-- I don't care if he's Gabriel, who became Noah. I don't care if he's Rafael, who became Enoch. I don't care if he's Michael, who became Adam-- at the end of the day, he's a fellow servant. He is not Christ, and he is not the Father. Okay?

So out of Egypt, they are taken, and what's the first thing that the Lord clarifies with Moses on the Mount? He tells him, "Okay, here's the way it's going to work now, Moses." "*I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*" Okay? "*Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments*" (Exodus 20:2-6).

So the first thing he says is, you're emerging from a culture in which there was this multiplicity of gods or angelic beings or whatever-- you're emerging from that culture; don't continue that. Don't petition to have the sentinels come, because God is jealous. When the three Nephites ministered to Mormon and Moroni, Mormon and Moroni ministered to the people. Because people are supposed to minister to people. We're supposed to find our way out of this dark hole, and the work of salvation is to be done by men in the flesh. These three Nephites ministered like angels to the prophet father and son, bearing the words of Christ, but the people heard the words of Christ from Mormon and Moroni, from their fellow man. There is absolutely nothing wrong with the ministering of angels, but I think there's something wrong with praying for angels, because it is exactly what Moses on the Mount was told: "Don't do that." And so if Moses on the Mount was told, "Don't do that," I don't think we ask for angels. I think we pray to God, and we ask God, and if God sends an angel, then the angel needs to come and identify his purpose. I mean, Gabriel, when he shows up in the temple to talk to Zacharias, says, "I am Gabriel who stand in the presence of God" (Luke 1:19), making it very clear who he was, where he came from, what his commission was, what his authority was.

John, on the Isle of Patmos, has this angel appear to him, and he falls down to worship him, and the angel says, "Oh, get up. Stop that. I'm just a servant like you. I'm just another man." So he stands up, and he starts delivering his message. And his message is, "*I am [the] Alpha and [the] Omega, [I am] the first and [I am] the last*" (Revelations 1:11). Okay so, okay now what you are is a recording of the Lord delivering it in the first person language of the Lord, so I'm getting God's words; I'm not getting yours. The guy I was just trying to worship, I'm not getting your words; I'm only getting the words of the Father.

When you put it all together, angels minister. They really do. Angels work, but they work largely behind the scenes. And if an angel has a message for all of us and had it in connection with this lesson, my supposition would be that the angel would come to you and talk to you and tell you what to tell us about these verses, and then you'd come and say, like we read in the *Book of Mormon* very often, "Last night when the angel visited me, he told me I needed to teach you

this.” This is King Benjamin talking. This is Jacob talking. This is Nephi talking. This is ever so many of them. “Last night-- now I’m going to give the lesson so, the night before the angel came and delivered to me...” and then you’d talk to us. What I would not expect is that a true angel would come and interrupt your lesson and say, “Now hold on, I got something to add here, and it’s really pretty cool. And by the way, did you notice I glow in the dark, and I’ve got authority?” Because that appearance as an angel of light, when that is the thing that is relied upon, generally is counterfeit. It is the substance of the content that determines the truthfulness of the message. And if the being attracts your adoration, they better be pretty quick about correcting you.

Don’t do that. That’s not how this works. They know that worshipping an idol will damn the worshipper. And if they’re sent on an errand from the Lord, and they manage to get people to worship them-- “O trust me, I can never lead you astray. You must follow what I have to say. I will save you; I will rise up of the congregation of the North; I will sit with those that lead and you will be safe if you follow me”-- is exactly what the adversary teaches. It’s not what the Savior does-- meekness, pure knowledge, gentleness, persuasion.

No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of any pretensions to authority. If you can’t persuade people by the content of the message, then the message doesn’t have the voice of God in it. And if it does have the voice of God in it, then they’re hearing the Master’s voice, and you’re irrelevant. They hear the Master’s voice, and they respond to that, then it’s between them and God, and they are hearing someone that is of God.

And some angels are busy people. And some are-- they have every kind of personality you’d ever want to run into. Some are brusque and busy and have a hard time doing their job, and some enjoy immensely any opportunity to interface with humanity. They’re just like people. They are people.

The foregoing are excerpts taken from remarks given by Denver Snuffer at various lectures, discussions and meetings over the past 11 years, including:

- Denver’s talk entitled “Christ’s Discourse on the Road to Emmaus,” given in Fairview Utah on April 14, 2007;
- His talk entitled “The Mission of Elijah Reconsidered,” given in Spanish Fork, UT on October 14, 2011;
- A fireside talk on “The Temple,” given in Ogden, UT on October 28, 2012;

- The presentation of Denver's paper entitled "Cutting Down the Tree of Life to Build a Wooden Bridge," given at the Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City, UT on August 2, 2014;
- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talks 2, 3, 4 and 8, given during 2013 and 2014;
- A regional conference Q&A session held at Big Cottonwood Canyon, UT on September 20, 2015;
- Denver's extemporaneous comments given at a fellowship meeting in Sandy, UT on December 6, 2015;
- His conference talk entitled "The Doctrine of Christ," given in Boise, ID on September 11, 2016;
- Denver's *Christian Reformation Lecture Series*, Talk #1 given in Cerritos, CA on September 21, 2017;
- A fireside talk entitled "The Holy Order," given in Bountiful, UT on October 29, 2017; and
- A fireside talk entitled "That We Might Become One," given in Clinton, UT on January 14, 2018.