

Angels | Luke 1:26-38 | 10 December 2017

This week we focus on four words found in our text: Angel, Gabriel, impossible and servant. The first three speak of God's revelation and action in the world through time – His working *in the ordinary relationships of life*.

*"...the **angel Gabriel** was sent from God to Mary and said to her, 'Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!'"* (Taken from Luke 1:26-27)

Angel = *angelos*

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Old Testament: There are two contrasting views of angels in the OT. (a) There are angels who are heavenly beings, members of Yahweh's court, who serve and praise him (Job 1:6; cf. Isa 6:2 f.). But in the older books they play no such special part. Historically this concept is associated with the Canaanite background. But Yahweh remained the sole creating power in nature and history, and angels never became autonomous or had cults dedicated to them in Israel. God's court also included other heavenly beings, especially in post-exilic writings. They are not always explicitly called angels, but "holy ones", "strong ones", "heroes", "sons of God" (perhaps better translated "heavenly beings"). Sometimes they appear in warlike contexts (c.g. Gen 32:1 f; Jos 5:13 ff.). They witnessed the creation of the world (Job 38:7), but as created beings they are not without fault (Job 4:18; 15:15). Yet they can be mediators of revelation (Zech 1:9, 11 ff.; 2:2-5 (2:6-9); Ezek 40:3). Also mentioned are "destroying angels" (Ps 78:49), "the destroyer" (Exod 12:23), and "ministers of death" (Job 33:22). Special kinds of angels are the cherubim, who show traits of both men and animals (Gen 3:24; Ezek 1:5-12; 10:19-22; 11:22; Ps 18:10), and the seraphim who have 6 wings (Isa 6a:2). 101

After the exile belief in angels greatly increased. This may well be explained by Israel's greater contact with other religions and increasing stress on Yahweh's transcendence, without any diminution in his activity in the world. This may have been a factor in the growth of belief in intermediate beings (cf. Job 5:1; 15:15; Ps 89:5, 7; Zech 14:5). In Daniel they appear as powerful intermediate beings with personal names, archangels, watchers, and angels of the nations. My millions surround God's throne (Dan 4:13, 17; 7:10; 8:16; 9:21; 10:5 f.; 12:1). 101

(b) We should distinguish these from the angel of Yahweh. He is a heavenly being given a particular task by Yahweh, behind whom the angel's personality entirely disappears. Hence it is wrong for the one to whom the angel has appeared to try and fathom his nature (cf. Jdg 13:17 f.). The angel of Yahweh appears almost always to help either Israel or an individual. He is virtually a hypostatic appearance of Yahweh, the personified help of God for Israel (Exod 14:19; Num 22:2; Jug 6:11-24; 2 Ki 1:3 f.). 101

New Testament: **angelos** is found 175 times in the NT (51 times in the Synoptics, 21 in Acts, 67 in Revelation). It is used of men only 6 times (Lk 7:24; 9:52; Jas 2:25; and Matt 11:10, Mk 1:2, Lk 7:27, quoting Mal 3:1). 1 2 Cor 12:7 **angelos Satana** may personify a disease. In general the Jewish concepts

of the OT are taken over. Angels are representatives of the heavenly world and God's messengers. When they appear, the supernatural world breaks into this one. Because God is present in Jesus, his way on earth is accompanied by angels (Matt 1:20; 2:13, 19; 28:2, 5; Mk 1:13; Lk 1:19; 2:9, 13; 22:43; Jn 1:51; cf Acts 1:10). At his coming again they will be at his side (Matt 13:49; 16:27; 25:31, 2 Thess 1:7). As Son of God, Jesus stands indisputably above the angels (Mk 13:27; Heb 1:4-14; Phil 2:9 ff.). 102

The concept of the guardian angel occurs in Matt 18:10 as an expression of the love of God for the "little ones" (cf. Acts 12:15). According to 1 Cor 11:10 angels watch over decorum. Angels are mediators of God's judgment (Acts 12:23). They act on behalf of the apostles (Acts 5:19; 12:7-10), and make God's will known to them (Acts 8:26; 10:3-8; 27:27 f.). 102-103

Gabriel = *Gabriel*

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The name comes for the root **geber** (man or strong) together with 'el (God). This suggests two meanings: man of God, or God is strong. In the *Old Testament* Gabriel appears only in Daniel, and there as a heavenly messenger who makes his appearance as a man (Dan 8:16,9:21). His functions are to reveal the future by interpreting a vision (8:17), and to give understanding and wisdom to Daniel himself (9:22). 103

Other late Jewish texts display much greater interest in Gabriel. His position of eminence in the presence of God is stressed... 103

In the *New Testament* Gabriel appears only in the Lukan birth narrative. There he is the angelic messenger announcing the births of John (1:11-20) and Jesus (1:26-38). As the one who comes from the immediate presence of God he brings reassurance to Mary of her standing in God's sight (1:30). 104

"Nothing will be impossible with God." (1:37)

Impossible = *adunatesei* [Future Active Indicative 3 person singular – ***adunateo***]

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Words deriving from the stem **duna** all have the basic meaning of "bring able," of "capacity" in virtue of an ability. 284

The Idea of Power in the OT. When we turn from the Greek and Hellenistic world to that of the OT, we enter a different atmosphere. In place of a neutral idea of God we have the personal God. In place of the neutral forces of nature we have the power and might of the personal God, which do not operate in terms of immanent law but which rather carry out the will of God according to His direction. This difference, based upon the whole conception of God, is plainly expressed in the concept of power. 290

The difference between the OT and the surrounding world is grounded in the distinctive relationship of the Godhead to history. As contrasted with the surrounding deities, which are essentially nature gods, the God of the OT is the God of history. The result is that the personalistic character of the idea of God is decisive, and that it absorbs the underlying naturalistic elements. This gives us the further result that the important and predominant feature is not force or power but the will which this power must execute and therefore serve. This is everywhere the decisive feature. 291

Like all other NT concepts, the concept of power is given its decisive impress by the fact of Christ. This sheds a distinctive light on the use, adoption and development of existing views. We must start, therefore, with the fact of Christ, and see what part is played in it by the concept of power. 299

There can be no disputing the link with the OT and Jewish picture of the Messiah. Of the OT Messiah Isaiah says that the spirit of counsel and strength rests upon Him (Is 11:2). He calls Him a mighty hero (9:5). Micah compares Him with a shepherd and says that He will tend His flock in the strength of the Lord (5:5). In the Royal Psalm 110:2, which was understood Messianically, we read: "The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion." In all these passages the picture of the Messiah is that of the King. The power granted to Him is victorious power to defeat His enemies... Messiah is thought of as a king like this, endowed with the strength of Yahweh. 299

This is the most important feature in the Lucan infancy story, which describes the conception and birth of Jesus as a miracle of incarnation in the power of God "And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God'" (1:35). 300

*"And Mary said, "Behold, I am the **servant** of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her."* (1:38)

Servant = *doulos*

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All the words in this ***doulos*** group [nine Greek words] serve either to describe the status of a slave or an attitude corresponding to that of a slave... The meaning is so unequivocal and self-contained that it is superfluous to give examples of the individual terms or to trace the history of the group. Hence we have a service which is not a matter of choice for the one who renders it, which he has to perform whether he likes or not, because he is subject as a slave to an alien will, to the will of his owner. 261

Prominent in the theological use of the word group in the NT is the idea that Christians belong to Jesus as His ***doulos***, and that their lives are thus offered to Him as the risen and exalted Lord. This notion is more comprehensive and far-reaching than the word group itself and thus appropriates many other words and word groups. 274

Thus the new state of the Christian comes under the thought of service, though in a very different sense from the earlier usage. The connexion of those liberated from the [salary] of the world, sin and death to the One who has liberated them links up with the occasional use of the term for commitment to God. This naturally results from the goal of the redemption, which is obedience rather than autonomy. When Christ undertakes the work of redemption, He makes the redeemed His own possession, giving them directions and goals by which to shape their lives. 275