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The Angels and the Giving of the Law

There are five texts in the Bible that speak of the angels' role in the giving of the law at Sinai. The first occurs in the last recorded speech of the 120-year-old Moses, at the start of the penultimate chapter of the Pentateuch—his blessing of Israel—where he tells us that he saw angels on Sinai thirty-eight years ago: “The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them” (Deut. 33:2).

David made the other Old Testament reference to angels at the giving of the law: “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place” (Ps. 68:17). The psalmist tells us that “twenty thousand, even thousands of angels”—Moses refers to “ten thousands” (Deut. 33:2)—came as an army (“chariots”). Like Moses, David also emphasises the impressiveness and awesomeness of the angels on the holy mount. (The psalmist's reference to “angels” makes it clear that the “saints” or holy ones in Deuteronomy 33:2 are heavenly messengers.)

The first believer recorded in the New Testament as referring to angels at Sinai is the deacon, disputer, apologist and martyr, Stephen. As part of his defence before the Sanhedrin, he stated that the Jews “received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it” (Acts 7:53). Here we learn that the angels were not only present at Mount Sinai but also that they had a role in the communication of the law to Moses.

Paul, battling against the Judaizers, provides the fourth biblical reference to angels at Mount Sinai: the law “was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator” (Gal. 3:19). The word here rendered “ordained” has the same Greek root as that translated “disposition” in Acts 7:53. The basic idea is that of arranging, ordering or appointing.

Hebrews 2:2, our fifth and final text, tells us not just that the law was given in the presence of angels (Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17) or that it was conveyed in an orderly way through angels (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19), but that the law was actually “spoken” by angels (to Moses): “the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward” (Heb. 2:2).

What was communicated by the angels here? Was it just the ten commandments or the whole body of law given at Sinai (cf. Ex. 19:1–Num. 10:10)? The answer is the latter, the whole body of the law. First, not only the decalogue was delivered at “Sinai” (Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17). Second, in his critique of apostate Judaism, Stephen meant that Israel had broken all the law and not just the ten commandments. Third, there is a comparison and contrast between the Old Testament law of Moses (not merely the decalogue) and the new covenant or gospel of Christ (Gal. 3:19;

Heb. 2:2).

What are the roles of the various parties in the giving of the law? Perhaps, before reading this article, you thought: God to Moses to the people. But there is a fourth party too, making it: God to the angels to Moses to the people. In fact, a fifth party is also involved: Christ (Acts 7:38, cf. v. 30), “the messenger of the covenant” (Mal. 3:1). This is the complete chain of revelation: the Triune God (the sovereign Lord and author of the law) to Christ (the pre-incarnate Word) to the angels (who were present to order and speak the law) to Moses (the Old Testament mediator) to the people of God.

This is analogous to the book of Revelation. Revelation 1:1 teaches this chain of revelation: God to Christ to an angel (not angels) to John (not Moses) to the people of God. A close reading of Daniel 8-12 and Zechariah 1-6 will reveal something similar regarding God’s revelation given through these two prophets.

Why should we have expected angels at Mount Sinai? First, we read of them in connection with key events in the Bible, e.g., creation (Job 38:7), the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1-2; Luke 1-2), Christ’s resurrection (Matt. 28:2-7) and the Lord’s second coming (II Thess. 1:7). Second, angels frequently are present at theophanies or appearances of God (e.g., Isa. 6; Eze. 1) and this was the greatest theophany in the Old Testament with regard to time (almost a year; Ex. 19:1, cf. Num. 10:11), viewers (a whole nation of some two million or more) and several impressive features (e.g., the earthquake, fire, clouds and voice of God). Third, angels are often involved in revelation (Dan. 8-12; Zech. 1-6; Rev. 1-22) and this is the greatest revelation in the Old Testament, both in terms of its “amount” (cf. Ex. 19:1–Num. 10:10) and its foundational role. Fourth, the good angels are especially interested in justice, a corollary of Jehovah’s law given at Sinai. All the unfallen angels live in the presence of the holy God and are all personally sinless and righteous. They all know what it was like before sin entered heaven and earth. They saw the fall of Satan and his angels (and God’s punishment of them) and the fall of Adam and Eve (and God’s judgment upon the human race and the earthly creation). No angel has experienced or will ever experience forgiving mercy.

The nature and history of the good angels and their role at the giving of the law are in full accord with the Bible’s presentation of them as ministers of God’s justice. They are powerful and holy, often evoking, even in believers, fear or trembling or falling to the ground. Look out for this as you read God’s Word. Also you will find that in Scripture the justice they administer to the impenitent wicked is usually death! *Rev. Stewart*

An attractive box set of 12 CDs on “Creation and the Angels,” plus handouts, is available for just £12 (inc. P&P). The audio classes on angels include their creation and nature, number and ranks, election and reprobation; cherubs, seraphs and archangels; their activities as God’s messengers, guardians of God’s people, ministers of God’s justice and worshippers of God. The final CD answers the vital question: “How Do Angels Benefit Us Today?”

Are All Infants Dying in Infancy Saved? (3)

The reader will recall that we are considering a number of texts that a correspondent sent in to defend the proposition that absolutely all infants who die in infancy are saved. In the two preceding issues of the *News*, I examined Ezekiel 18:1-4, 20, Jeremiah 32:18-19 and Deuteronomy 1:19. In every case there was no evidence whatsoever that could serve as proof that all infants who die in infancy are saved.

In this issue of the *News*, I continue a discussion of the texts that were cited. Next in line is Isaiah 7:16: “For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.”

I really do not see the need of spending any time explaining this verse. It seems sometimes that the defender of the proposition that all infants dying in infancy are saved chooses rather randomly any text that speaks of children. One ought to give some thought to a verse, it seems to me, before quoting it in proof of what is, after all, a very serious doctrinal matter.

The child referred to in the text is the child spoken of in Isaiah 7:14-15. That child is to be born of a virgin, and is, as all admit, a reference to the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:23). It has, therefore, nothing to do with the question we face.

The next text summoned in defence of the correspondent’s position is Jonah 4:10-11: “Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?”

While it is true that the text refers to the fact that Nineveh was a huge city in which were more than sixty thousand children, those children did not die in infancy, for they were spared because the city repented at the preaching of Jonah. It is, therefore, impossible to conclude from this passage that all infants dying in infancy are saved, because all these infants did not die.

It is possible that the questioner argues somewhat along these lines: God spared Nineveh, that is, God saved Nineveh. In that city were sixty thousand children. God saved sixty thousand children. Perhaps some of those children died in infancy. They were therefore saved.

I doubt whether that is the line of argument the questioner follows, but, if it is, the reasoning is false. The text does not speak of any infants that died in infancy, but only of children that were spared destruction. Even if we assume that infants did die, the text simply does not say that they went to heaven. We do great wrong to Scripture if we try to read all these things into the text.

It is well to emphasize a couple of truths from this important passage. Jonah (and Israel) had to be taught that the day was coming when the church of Christ would be saved from all the nations of the earth—even Nineveh, Israel’s arch-enemy (Matt. 12:41). Further, contrary to Baptist doctrine, the text teaches that when God does gather His church from the Gentiles, the same principle will hold true that was true in the old dispensation: God saves His people in the line of

generations, believers and their seed. But of infants dying in infancy the text says nothing.

Matthew 25:45-46 is also mentioned. Of this text it is said: "At the final judgment Christ will reject those on His left hand on the basis of what they had not done. Since infants dying in infancy cannot do those things, how can they be rejected?"

The text reads, "Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

The argument, I think, runs along these lines. A person is given heaven on the basis of his good works and the wicked go to hell because they have not done good works. This is a position that is contrary to Scripture. It is basically an Arminian position that teaches that every man is punished or rewarded on the basis of what he has chosen to do or not to do by his own free will.

Let it be emphasized, first of all, that a man is not given heaven because he, by his own power or with his own spiritual resources, has made himself worthy. Salvation is by grace alone. It is by grace for adults, as well as children (Eph. 2:8-10). Matthew 25 itself emphasizes this when Christ says to His sheep, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (34). It is also evident that this is true from the fact that these saved are "the righteous," not because of their works, but because of the righteousness of Christ freely imputed to them by grace. Finally, it is evident from the fact that these righteous are not aware themselves that they have done anything good (37-39). They are unaware of this because they know that God works in them to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13)

It is also true that the wicked go to hell because of the just judgment of God who punishes the wicked for their sin. But the Scriptures also teach that behind man's disobedience and punishment for sin stands the sovereign decree of reprobation. God saves His people according to the decree of election in the line of generations, but God also reprobates in the line of generations.

God punishes those who worship graven images unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him (Ex. 20:5). That includes children. Romans 9 is so clear one has to be willingly obtuse not to see that sovereign reprobation is taught in this passage. There is no evidence that sovereign reprobation excludes the children of reprobates who die in infancy.

I am fully aware of the fact that few believe the truth of double predestination in our day. But let us not forget that Augustine taught it in the fifth century; all the Reformers preached it, including Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and Knox; and the doctrine is clearly incorporated in the Reformation confessions, including the *Belgic Confession*, the *Canons of Dordt* and the *Westminster Confession*.

Nevertheless, regardless of all these things, Matthew 25:44-45 does not teach the salvation of all who die in infancy. Such an error is an illegitimate deduction that the text does not support.

Prof. Hanko

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church

Lord's Day services at 11 am & 6 pm • 83 Clarence Street, Ballymena, BT43 5DR
Pastor: Angus Stewart, 7 Lislunna Road, Kells, Ballymena, N. Ireland, BT42 3NR
(028) 25 891 851 • pastor@cprc.co.uk • www.cprc.co.uk • www.youtube.com/cprcni