

The Angel of the Lord

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Welcome to our regularly scheduled Sunday evening service. Well, much like this morning we're at the same time, in the same location, but everything appears to be much different. Again, because of the timely events of what is taking place in the globe today, we find ourselves communicating to you by way of an online audience.

Now as I mentioned this morning, I want to go over this one more time. This is hopefully a very temporary situation. As I've mentioned in several forms of communication, we are evaluating this on a day by day, an hour by hour evaluation. It is our goal, it is our desire to return to our normal large gatherings as soon as it is advised possible to do so. Please continue to pay attention to the text messages, the emails, the social media posts that First Baptist, Opelika, puts out so that you will be in the know on all the things that are happening in the days ahead. Again, this is hopefully a very temporary process but we are grateful that we have the technology today to be able to communicate the word of God into our lives.

As I mentioned this morning at the end of 1 Thessalonians 4, the purpose of the truth of God's word is to comfort us and that's one thing we definitely need in these days of great uncertainty as we look to those that are making decisions and we've got policy that's coming out. Oftentimes it is very uncertain and we need the comfort from the word of God.

I also mentioned this morning that today has been declared by many as a National Day of Prayer and so tonight before we go into the studying of God's word, I want to pause just a moment not only to pray for those in leadership, that they will exercise wisdom, for those who are sick and need healing, but also for ourselves, that we will allow the word of God to work into our hearts and our lives and allow us to live out the comfort that it promises to give us.

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, as we gather tonight, much like this morning we find ourselves in a multitude of locations but, God, with the same copy of your word in front of us. Help us, O God, to be joined in your work, to hear what it says to our lives, and allow it to

respectively teach us how to live our lives. Lord, we again continue to pray for those that are in leadership, those that are making decisions, Lord, may they have discernment, may they have wisdom from on high. God, we pray for those who are suffering illness and sickness, particularly in these days of a pandemic, that you would bring healing. God, we pray that you would bring strength to the medical personnel and to those who are first responders. God, we pray that you would give comfort to communities and that you would allow us as we talked about today, to not have unwarranted fear but to walk and act in wisdom and discernment. Thank you, O God, that even in days of uncertainty, we have the truth of your word, we have the truth of your Holy Spirit in our lives, and that we do not have to succumb to the spirit of fear but you will give us power, love and a sound mind. We pray that not just for ourselves but for all those that are involved in decision-making policies today. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Well, tonight we find ourselves in the book of 1 Chronicles 21, and I mentioned this morning if you're brand new to us, we are continuing to walk through a Bible reading plan as a family of faith that takes us through the entirety of Scripture over about a three year period. This last week as we walked through this section in 1 Chronicles, we found ourselves where David became the King of Israel and tonight we're headed toward the end of his reign where eventually he will hand over the kingdom to whom we know as his son Solomon.

In chapter 21 of the book of 1 Chronicles, we find ourselves in one of those moments in David's life where he gave in to the flesh, one of those times where he made a poor decision that as you're gonna see in just a moment, was incredibly costly. The Lord is gonna present some options for him as far as the consequences are concerned, but tonight we're not studying so much the error or the sin in David's life or even the consequence, though as grave as it was thereof, but we're gonna study this character known as the angel of the Lord that appears in this story.

I'm gonna begin reading in verse 8 of 1 Chronicles 21. Hopefully you have a copy of God's word with you at the kitchen table, in the living room, wherever you find yourself this evening. It says,

8 And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing:

Now I'm gonna push pause there for just a moment. You may not be familiar with the story in the background here and you're wondering what did David do. Well, he actually went out and he numbered the people. He was to be confident in just the fact that he was in a protective environment, and yet he went out because of his flesh and his personal desires and inclinations and he numbered the people even though the Lord guided him not to, and even though the prophet of God told him not to, he did so anyway. Here he is confessing his sin. You know, oftentimes we look at the character of David and we say how could this be a man after God's own heart? He had this horrific incident with Bathsheba, he numbers the people here and 70,000 die, what makes that a man after God's own heart? Well, in Psalm 51, we see David's response after Bathsheba. Here in 1

Chronicles 21 we see his response after numbering the people. In both of these incidences, it's not the fact that David sinned because we all fall into sin, it's that he repented of his sin. He was upset about his sin and he wanted to make restitution and restoration for his sin. So here he confesses that he has sinned. He says, "but now," this is the middle of verse 8,

8 ... but now, I beseech thee, do away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly. 9 And the LORD spake unto Gad, David's seer, saying, 10 Go and tell David, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things: choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. 11 So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee 12 Either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to him that sent me. 13 And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the LORD; for very great are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man. 14 So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men.

Now I'm gonna pause there one more time. If you're not familiar with the story, you may be thinking that the Lord gave David, here's three consequences to your sin, choose which door you want to walk through. What we actually see here is David coming back to the Lord saying, "It doesn't matter what you bring upon me, I submit myself to your leadership, I submit myself even to your sovereignty in this situation."

Do you find it interesting that this is the Bible passage that we are to read this week? This was the one that was scheduled almost three years ago and what was it that the Lord brought to the land? It was pestilence. It was illness. It was a plague. It was a pandemic. And so the situation that we find in 1 Chronicles 21 is eerily similar to the situation of why I'm in an empty room tonight. We don't have a story just like David's but we do have pestilence in the land and thousands and thousands of people have lost their lives.

We pick up the story in verse 15. It says,

15 And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. 16 And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. 17 And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? let

thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued. 18 Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.

Now in this story when we read to the conclusion, we find out that David is going to worship before the Lord, the plague or the pestilence is going to be stayed, but what's interesting is this character known as the angel of the Lord, and today we live in a world that whether it's movies we watch, books we read, or even figurines that we find in our homes, this concept or idea of the angelic world is fascinating to us. There are those that have claimed to receive visions from angels. There are those that claim to be in regular communication with angels. In fact, there was a famous movie years ago around what we know as the Christmas season that says that every time a bell rings, an angel gets its wings. And there's a whole lot of folklore and imagery and ideas regarding the angelic realm but tonight over the course of the next few moments, I want to do a brief study of what we know as the angelic beings, specifically in regards to this one entitled the angel of the Lord. Of all the angelic host, he is the most unique of all of them and so we're gonna kinda start big and work our way to his specific identity.

The first thing I want to do tonight is simply do an analysis of what we might formally call angelology or a study of the angelic host, and I want to divide this analysis into two sections: a quantitative and a qualitative.

Let's start with quantity. The Bible says in Hebrews 12:22 that on Mount Zion, and by the way that's Mount Zion with an "S," not "Z" as we would see on the physical land of the Middle East today, that's the mountain of the Lord in the heavenlies, it says that there is an innumerable number of angels. In other words, there is a number of angelic host that cannot be numbered by man.

Now if we take that quantitatively and begin to look at it, one of the things that we discover is that the angelic host or the angelic beings have been here long before you and I ever were. In fact, the Bible begins, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." It's a pretty good summary statement that everything that we know was created by and initiated by God himself, but when we go to Job 38, we get some interesting insight into how that all took place. In Job 38, the Lord descends out of a whirlwind to the man whom we know as Job, one who had been sick and on the dunghill, had his friends betray him, his children have deceased, his money is gone, he stayed faithful to the Lord, the Lord rewards him ultimately in chapter 42, but in chapter 38 the Lord comes to Job and he asked him 35 very unique questions. Now we're not gonna unpack all those questions tonight but he makes this statement in Job 38:7, the Lord says that when he created what we know as the universe, that the sons of God sang for joy. In your Old Testament, the term "sons of God" is a term that is also utilized for the concept of an angelic being, and so when we talk about the quantity of angels or the number of angels, we need to understand that their presence, their existence was prior to the biblical account of Adam and Eve on the sixth day of Genesis 1.

Why is that important to the quantity? Because the Bible also speaks that one of the angelic realm, one by the name of Lucifer, a cherubim of God which is a classification of angels, I'll deal with him in just a moment, that prior to what we know as the garden of Eden, there was a rebellion in the heavenlies. The Bible says in Isaiah 14:12-14 that he wanted to ascend on the mountain of God and to be like the Most High God, to go above the clouds and to assert his throne above the throne of God. The Bible also records in Luke 9 and in other passage that when he rebelled, when he tried to usurp the presence and the power of God, that there were angelic beings that fell with him. Now there have been some over time who have tried to number those who fell with him.

Now allow me to remind you that in Hebrews 12:22 as I quoted earlier, it says the number is innumerable and so from a human perspective it is impossible to truly quantify the angelic hosts, but nonetheless in the book of Revelation 12, it says that there was a war in heaven and that whom we know as Satan took a third of the stars or a third of the angelic beings and they were removed from the presence of the Lord. Now John Milton who penned the great literary work "Paradise Lost" declared that that was the number of the angels that fell with Satan prior to what you and I know as the garden of Eden. Well, interesting that how do you get one third of innumerable, but really that passage in Hebrews 12 is more from a human's perspective, it is innumerable. But nonetheless, when you really look at Revelation 12, I don't believe it's speaking the fall of Satan in days past but the complete removal of Satan from the presence of God in days future.

That being said, really tonight is not about the when and the where but the how much. We know that the Bible says the number is innumerable from a human perspective, and even though the Bible does say in times future as I believe but times past as others, that a third fell with Satan, we would have to agree that the number of angelic beings at least based on biblical Scriptures is incredibly greater than even the number of humanity on earth. In fact, it has been said by many that we do not know, nor could we quantify, the number of angelic beings as far as the ratio is to humanity.

In the Middle Ages, the theologians used to debate among themselves how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, in other words, they knew that they were more numerous than the human creation so therefore how many of them and how, shall we say, concise could they make their presence. Even though that sounds like a good theological argument, it's actually very, I guess it has some fallacies therein because every time an angel shows up in the Bible, and this is gonna be important in just a moment, every time they show up, they always have the appearance of a man. There is never this idea that they take up just a small bit of what we know as the space continuum; that they have the appearance thereof, in fact, what we know in the book of Hebrews says that you and I have entertained angels unaware and I think that you and I would not be deceived by that but we realize that there are those of the angelic host who appear as the Bible describes them in human form always as a male, very different than oftentimes what we know as the movies, books, or even personal experience may describe them as.

So tonight we could go ad nauseam about the number of them but just think of it in these terms, that as you look at the world that is around you, this room right now is almost completely empty of humanity but I would daresay that according to Scripture there is a very good chance that there is an enormous amount of the angelic host not just in this place but maybe wherever you are right now, and everywhere that you go and everywhere you travel, as the old song that we sang, that we're standing on holy ground and we know that there are angels all around. We may not be able to see, hear or feel, but the Bible says that there is an angelic creation there that is more numerous than we could ever count. They are not just on Mount Sion in the heavenlies, they're not just those that have fallen with Lucifer, we discover throughout the biblical text that they are in and around almost every situation that humanity comes into contact with.

So that's the quantity, what about the quality? I'm gonna break down the angelic, shall we say, beings into certain categories that the Bible addresses. This is completely relevant to this angel of the Lord character and we're gonna start with the broadest category and make our way to the famous angel of the Lord.

Your general run-of-the-mill angel according to Hebrews 1:14 is a ministering spirit. Again I mention the Bible says they are innumerable as far as a quantitative analysis is concerned, but they always show up in a human form. Your regular run-of-the-mill angel in the Bible is not as is often portrayed in the media and shall I say the movies and the books and the figurines of today. I don't know why or how it is that we have pictured this kind of short, squatty guy with wings, a halo and a harp as being an angel, but when you find angelic beings in the Bible just as we read earlier, oftentimes they are warlike creatures. Even though they have the appearance of man, they are powerful, they are strong, they are insightful, they are swift of movement, much different than humanity often desires or wants to portray them.

The general populace of the angelic host does not possess wings. Now as I mentioned, that's usually a typical aspect of the figurines and even the way that they are described or even painted. The angelic host as a general rule do not possess wings but there are two classifications of angels that do possess wings: the seraphim and the cherubim. Now let me divide between those two. The seraphim only show up in one passage in your Bible, in the book of Isaiah 6, probably the most famous missionary passage where Isaiah says, "Here am I. Send me, Lord." That's on the backside of a story where he sees the glory of the Lord high and lifted up, he sees the train of his robe filling the temple, he sees the pillars shake, he declares, "I am a man of unclean lips and I live among people of unclean lips." It is there that a seraphim described as a winged creature, an angelic being, takes a coal off the altar of the Lord, places it on Isaiah's lips and he cleanses him and he purifies him. The seraphim only show up one time in your Bible and when they do so, they're to emphasize the holiness of God and the presence of the Lord. As I mentioned, that's the only time they show up. It is a unique situation where a sinful man comes into contact with a seraphim who on behalf of the Lord, remember as a whole they are ministering spirits, he cleanses him, he purifies him, he prepares him to hear from God to go out and to become one of the greatest prophets that the Bible speaks of.

The next classification would be called the cherubim. Now I mentioned we've got regular seraphim and the cherubim. The cherubim actually show up more often. The first time they show up at least in our Bible is in the book of Genesis 3 when what we know as Adam and Eve were discarded out of the garden, when they were removed for their transgression and for their sin. Remember at the end of chapter 3, the Lord put a cherubim at the gate of the garden so that nobody would be able to enter in again, in fact, the Bible says that they had flaming swords so that nobody would be able to enter.

Now I mention that was the first reference in your Bible but it's actually not the first chronological reference of cherubim in Scripture. The Bible as we know it does not necessarily follow a chronological path. For example, what we know as the book of Job right before Psalms was most likely the first book of the Bible the Lord actually gave us, at least the oldest character thereof, and what we know as Ezekiel and Isaiah give us passages of Scripture about the fall of Satan that would have, shall we say, come before that incident with the cherubim at the garden of Eden. What we know in Ezekiel 28, the person who we know as Lucifer is referred to – listen to this – as the cherubim over the throne of God.

Why is that important? Because earlier in chapter 1 and in chapter 10 of the book of Ezekiel, it describes the throne of God. Remember that crazy imagery there where you've got the wheel within the wheel, and the eyes all around, and the throne of God descending and turning without turning and go in any direction. It says there at the four corners of the throne are the four cherubim of God. Now based on what we see in the book of Genesis 3, these are definitively warlike powerful angelic hosts, after all, they are entrusted with the throne of God and whom we know as Lucifer, the lighted one who would become Satan and the devil, was actually allowed placement over the throne of God.

So what we see in Ezekiel is at least five cherubim beings, four around the edges and one over the top, but remember Lucifer fell and when he fell and became whom we know as Satan the devil, that place was vacated and no longer occupied. Interesting when you get to the book of Revelation, the cherubim show up again. There in chapters 4 and 5, we have these famous beasts just like Ezekiel with the famous faces around the throne of God, and in the book of Revelation there is no mention of the cherubim over the throne of God, just the cherubim around the throne of God.

I realize tonight this is a whole lot of information about a subject matter that you could take an entire seminary course on but we're gonna make it brief. You have angels in general, you have seraphim one time in the Bible, holiness, cherubim several times in the Bible, angels of valor, shall we say, around or above the throne of God. Then we find ourselves into a select three. There are only three angels in the Bible that are actually given names to us from God.

We have one whom we know as Gabriel. Gabriel's probably most famous not just for his interaction with humanity in the Scriptures but in particular what we know as the Christmas story. It is Gabriel who comes to Joseph. It is Gabriel who is there regarding

John the Baptist. He is the one that brings assurance to the people and the characters involved in what we know as the nativity or the birth of Jesus Christ. He is an angel of communication. He is an angel of comfort. He speaks on behalf of God clearly, not that other angels do not as well but he's the only one that's given a name.

The other one that we have by name is by the name of Michael. Michael is called the archangel. He shows up in the book of Daniel. He's the representative over and protective of whom we know as the people of God or whom we know properly as Israel. He is the one that fights on their behalf and you may remember that famous story where Daniel prays to the Lord for deliverance and whom we know as Michael shows up and he says, "I would have been here earlier but I've been fighting with the Prince of Persia for three weeks." And then later it says he fights the Prince of Greece. Then when you get to the book of Jude it says that Michael fought with the devil over the body of Moses. He is the warrior-like protector of the people of God.

So we have whom we know as Gabriel as the communicator on behalf of God. We have Michael as the protector. And then, yes, there was Lucifer. He's the only other angelic being that is given a name in Scripture. Over the throne of God, the protector of the throne of God, one who vacated because according to Ezekiel 28, iniquity was found within him.

So when you look at the quality of angels in the Bible, there is this mass innumerable, at least from our perspective, of angelic beings. There's only one story about seraphim, a couple stories about cherubim. We have these ones with names that show up periodically and then there's the one who we discuss tonight: the angel of the Lord, a classification all to himself. There is no mention of wings like the cherubim or seraphim. There is no mention of a specific name like Gabriel, Michael or Lucifer. He is simply referred to as the angel of the Lord. So tonight when we look at this story about David's life, when we look at other stories in the Scripture where the angel of the Lord shows up, what we're actually observing and studying is one of the most unique angelic presences in all of Scripture, and so when the angel of the Lord shows up, what we're about to see is this: things happen that don't happen with cherubim or seraphim, Gabriel or even Michael. In fact, we're gonna witness tonight that there are comments that are made, statements that are made, things that are done by and towards whom we know as the angel of the Lord that are done to no other angelic being. He is one who is set aside, even though he is called the angel of the Lord, he is completely distinctly different than any other angelic creation of the universe.

Now that being said, that is a very large analysis of the quantity and the quality, so when you get to this passage in 1 Chronicles and others as we'll see in just a moment, I want to discuss an article. Now I don't want to get into an English lesson tonight, but when I mention an article, I mean the definitive article. It says "the" angel of the Lord. There is a big difference between "an angel" and "the angel." There is a huge difference with we played a game or we played the game. When you use the definite article, you are stating that that event, that person, that situation stands on its own as a most unique scenario and so whether we are describing an event in our life, a situation in our life, or one of the

angelic host, there is a huge difference between "an angel" because when you say "an angel of the Lord" it could be one of a multitude of classifications, when you say "the angel of the Lord," it's not referring to Gabriel, it's not referring to Michael, it's not referring to cherubim or seraphim, it's referring to this very unique angelic being and here in this passage several times it says "the angel of the Lord stood between heaven and earth. The angel of the Lord came and spoke. The angel of the Lord went here and did this."

So when I talk about an article, the fact that it says "the angel of the Lord" is very particular and let me encourage you as you take this study and you go further and deeper in your own life and as you continue to read and see this character show up all throughout the Scriptures, anytime you see the phrase "angel of the Lord," look in front of the word "angel" and see if it says "an" or "the." If it uses the article "an," it's just a regular angelic being on the bidding of the Lord. If it says "the angel of the Lord," then you're dealing with this particular entity that David interacted with in 1 Chronicles 21.

The other aspect that I want to address, I guess from a syntax perspective, is if you'll notice what it says the angel of the Lord, if you look down at your Bible, if you look at in particular and I'm looking at verse 18 here but you could also go to verse 16, notice it says, "Then the angel of the LORD," notice the capitalization of "LORD." It's in all capitals. There's a capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D. That is not just a term of respect that the Bible translators are using. It is communicating a very specific theological truth of which is appropriate to the study of the angel of the Lord. When you see the word "Lord" in all capital letters in your Bible, that is a reference to the word or to the title or to the name that we would commonly refer to as Yahweh. The most common time that we see this is in Exodus 3, and remember when Moses is there, and by the way, we'll deal with this in just a moment, when he's at the burning bush that's not consumed, you realize who he's having a conversation with, right? It is the angel of the Lord, and he asks, "Who should I say is sending me? When I go back to Pharaoh, they're not gonna believe me." He says, "I Am That I Am." That is the word Yahweh and it contains four consonants if we were to look at it written out.

Why is that important? Because the name Yahweh was and is so holy not only to the Jewish people but to people of faith, that it was not to be spoken out loud. In fact, oftentimes you'll hear the word Jehovah, all the word Jehovah is in your Bible is the word Yahweh with vowels placed in it, and when you use Jehovah, more often than not in your Bible it would say Jehovah-Nisi, Jehovah-Jireh, Jehovah-Shalom, it's actually hyphenated that the Lord is my strength, the Lord is my this, the Lord is my that. So when you begin to see the words for "Lord" or for "God" in the Bible, understand that LORD in all capital letters is Yahweh, when you see the word Jehovah, it is a pronunciation or a utilization of the same word but in a more descriptive sense, but when the Jewish people would speak the name of God, they would oftentimes use the word Adonai. The word Adonai is not a Hebrew word found in the Hebrew Old Testament, it is a human construction of speaking the name of God without treading upon the name of God.

Allow me to use a modern-day hopefully relevant example. If you and I were to go today to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, you and I are familiar with the fact that there is the

Dome of the Rock, it is a Muslim mosque that is there on the center of that platform, and even though the Jewish people, even the archaeologists have no idea exactly where the original temple site was, the faithful Jewish people today will not even get on the Temple Mount because they are fearful that they might step where the Holy of Holies used to be and they do not want to breach the holiness of God. That is the same thing that happens when they utilize the name for God. As we approach the Passover season, you will notice in the grocery stores that food that has been deemed kosher, that which has been blessed by a Jewish rabbi. When you see a description of it, they will not even write the name God. Oftentimes there will be a G, a dash, and then a d, because they do not want to violate what we know as the third commandment, they don't want to take the Lord's name in vain and if somehow incidentally or accidentally violate his holiness.

Why is that important? Because when it says "the angel of the LORD" in all capital letters, it is saying the definitive representative, the definitive presence, the definitive communication of Yahweh himself. This isn't just an angel of God, this isn't just one of the masses or one of the many. You will see the definite article "the" in front of "angel" and "LORD" in all capital letters, when you see that construction "the angel of the LORD," all capitals and "the" at the front, you are seeing a designation to this entity that is different than all other angelic hosts in all of the biblical order.

Now I realize tonight that that is a fire hydrant of angelology and information but it was an important backstory to the passages that we're about to read because you and I have to answer a very strategic question when it comes to the angel of the Lord tonight. The question is this: is he a representative of God or is he an identification of God? Two choices, either a representative of God or an identification of God. And what I want to do, much like we did at the beginning, is look at these passages quantitatively and qualitatively, we're not gonna look at every single passage that the Bible alludes to or addresses with the angel of the Lord but I do want to walk through some of these passages with you and in particular I'm gonna give you a warning in advance, we're gonna go to the book of Zechariah toward the end of your Old Testament for one of the most colorful stories that we have in the Bible regarding the angel of the Lord.

Now the very first instance that we have of the angel of the Lord showing up as far as the chronology of humanity is concerned is actually found in the book of Genesis 16. In Genesis 16 we have a woman by the name of Hagar who has had a child by the name of Ishmael. This was not the son of promise. This was not the one whom the Lord said would come from Abraham to have the seed of promise for that was to be Sarah and Abram and their child whom we would later know as Isaac who would father Jacob and the famous 12 tribes, of which the tribe of Judah would present whom we know eventually Jesus Christ the Messiah. But in Genesis 16, Hagar has been dismissed. Her and Ishmael are out in the wilderness and we actually see the first blessing of God and there in Genesis 16:10 it says the angel of the LORD shows up and that he blesses her child, blesses her, and says he will be a mighty man, he will be a warrior, he will be one who will be despised by many. Interesting that the angel of the LORD as far as humanity is concerned, his first manifestation, his first appearance to humanity is to bless one who

was not the child of promise and to protect him by saying he would always be despised by Isaac's descendants but he would multiply himself and be a mighty man in the earth.

So the very first appearance of the angel of the LORD is declaring a truth that can still be seen today. The descendants of Ishmael, now this is a very broad stroke analysis, are those that we typically see in the Middle Eastern world today. They are people of the wilderness. They are people that are mighty. They are people that are numerous. And when it comes to the other side of the family, Isaac and his descendants, I think it's very easy to see that there is a great antagonism between them. Why is that important? Because what the angel of the LORD spoke in that day in Genesis 16 is a truth that is still valid today.

The next time that we see the angel of the LORD show up is in Genesis 18. Now this is really interesting and, by the way, I'm just gonna allude to these stories rather than taking the time and going back and reading them, this is the story of Abram and Sarah where she laughs at the fact that almost near age 90 she is going to have a child. These are the ones that tell her her son's name will be Isaac because she laughed. The Bible says that three men showed up and spoke to Abram. Remember he was outside the tent, Sarah was inside the tent, she heard and she laughed. There would be two of these men who would accompany Abram to what we know as Sodom and Gomorrah. We know the famous story where those men desired to be with the angelic host, they left the city, destruction came upon it, but I want here is this or what I want you to hear is this: there were three men who showed up to the tent that day and the one that spoke, the angel of the LORD, is actually referred to in Genesis 18 as the LORD. Interesting that he does not accompany Abram to Sodom and Gomorrah. He is there at the beginning, he's not there at the end, and when he speaks, he speaks on behalf of the Lord. So again, he is referred to as the angel of the LORD. He speaks on behalf of the LORD but he is not there at the Sodom and Gomorrah experience.

Exodus 3. I alluded to it a moment ago. This is Moses after 40 years of wandering with his father-in-law in the backside of nowhere after he killed the Egyptian for killing the Hebrew back in Egypt. He comes upon a bush that is burning but it's not being consumed and it says that angel of the LORD appears out of the fire, speaks to him. What's interesting about this story is when he says, "Who shall I say sent me?" He says, "I Am That I Am." What you see happening in Exodus 3 is almost a progression here. In Genesis 16, the angel of the LORD shows up and speaks on behalf of the Lord. In Genesis 18, he's referred to as the LORD. Here in Exodus 3, he addresses the name as the LORD. He doesn't say, well, the Lord's name is "I Am That I Am," he says, "You say I Am That I Am." And what you see happening throughout the Scriptures is that progressively whom we know as the angel of the LORD continues to take upon qualities, aspects and attributes that if we're to be honest with ourselves are only reserved for the Lord himself.

Another passage of Scripture that I want to allude to before going to Zechariah is found in the book of Judges 13. Judges 13, the Lord has come to the parents of whom we know as Samson. Remember that incredibly strong individual, that judge of Israel who fell and

had a Nazirite vow. He was not to consume anything of an alcoholic nature. He was to not eat anything that was from the carcass of a dead animal, and he was never to have his hair cut. We know him by the end of his story. We know him breaking down the walls of the Philistines' false god and destroying more Philistines in his death than he ever did in his life. We know him as one who, to be quite honest, appears as a great failure but his last act is one of great faith. But in chapter 13 when the Lord comes to his parents and declares that Samson will be not just conceived by born of them, that he will be a Nazirite from his womb, it says that it is the angel of the LORD that comes and has the conversation with them. What is significant there is in verse 21 and 22 of Judges 13. Samson's dad turns to his mom and says, "We have seen God face-to-face." And the same concept is also articulated back in what we know as Genesis 18 with Abram and Sarah as well. So here we have a situation where the angel of the LORD not only communicates truth about the people of God but those who observe and those who hear declare that they've seen God face-to-face.

The final passage that I don't just want to allude to but have you turn to is found in Zechariah 3, toward the end of your Old Testament. We have a situation take place where Joshua, the high priest of God, is standing before the Lord and Satan comes to accuse him and I just want to read the story with you, hopefully you've turned to Zechariah 3, I just want to read about six or seven verses here and I want you to see how the angel of the LORD doesn't just manifest himself to Joshua but what he communicates to Joshua about what the Lord is doing in his life. It says in verse 1,

1 And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. 2 And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? 3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. 4 And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. 5 And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by. 6 And the angel of the LORD protested unto Joshua, saying, 7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.

What is fascinating about this this passage, if you can just imagine the scene, you have Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, Satan shows up to rebuke him and to accuse him, and when the scene begins to develop, notice in verse 2, "the LORD said unto Satan." In this particular passage, whom we know as the angel of the LORD doesn't just speak on behalf of the Lord but when he speaks, it says the LORD, all capital letters, is speaking, then when you get to verse 3 and 4, it says that the angel of the

LORD declares that Joshua, his filthy garments can be put away because he has been made clean. He says, "I have caused your iniquity to pass from thee."

Now why is this the passage that we're building up to? Why is this the one that I wanted to focus on? Because there is only entity in the entire universe who can allow and cause your and my sin or Joshua's sin to be removed from them and that's God himself. There is no angel in existence that can remove sin from you. There is no pastor, there is no priest, there is no prophet, nobody can look at you or me and say, "I have absolved you from your sin." Only God can do that and yet here in this story, the angel of the LORD speaks to Joshua and says, "Your sin is removed. Take off the filthy garments." And what do you see happening here as you build upon in the Old Testament is you see the angel of the LORD continuing to take on the characteristics of the Lord himself.

Now again tonight, it's not an exhaustive study of who this character is but I want to go back to the question that I asked earlier: is he simply representative or is he identifying as? There are some of you and it is okay, don't worry, who will say, "Well, the angel of the LORD just represents the Lord. He just speaks on his behalf and when the Lord has a very unique and a very special message rather than sending Gabriel, he ups the ante and he sends the angel of the LORD." That is a means or ways of looking at who this character is. But if you look at the passages that we've read, here is one who doesn't just speak on behalf of God, here is one who when people interact with him say they've seen God and then he does things in Zechariah 3 that are reserved for God only. So there are those who would say that this is actually the identification of God.

Let me unpack that for just a moment as we draw this study to a close. Whom we know as Jesus Christ, and hear me very clearly, this is very important, has always been. There has never been a time where Jesus Christ has not been in existence. He is God, alright? In fact, that's why the night before his crucifixion when they came to him in the garden of Gethsemane they said, "Who are you?" He said, "I Am." He literally was calling himself Yahweh and 500 of them fell backwards. Jesus Christ is not some created being or second tier God that somehow showed up on the scene. He is the part of the Godhead who we commonly refer to as the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

So when Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem some 2,000 years ago, that's not when he began, that's not when his existence began. In fact, in 1 Timothy 6 it says that Jesus Christ is the only immortal one. In other words, he's the only one who has always been and who always will be. He is God. That's why he got in trouble in John 8 because to the Pharisees who were arguing with him, he declared that Abraham celebrated when he saw his day and before Abraham was, he, he said, "I am." He didn't say he was, he said, "I am."

So Jesus Christ has always been. What's important for our study tonight is this, that for 33 and a little over a half years, Jesus Christ was incarnated, he was dwelt in flesh, that's why John 1 says, "The Word," Jesus, "became flesh." For those 33 plus years, he walked among humanity, he taught humanity, he did miracles among humanity, and ultimately he gave his life and rose from the dead to save humanity from our sins. But Jesus Christ

is the same yesterday, today and forever. He has always been and there are places in your Bible where we see in the Old Testament characters that show up that are unlike any other characters in the Bible, they say things that are reserved for God, they do things that are reserved for God, and there's a big fancy word, we call it theophany. It means that God, theos, he shows himself to humanity in a way they can hear or see, and even in some cases feel. More specifically, there are places, and we've read some of them tonight, we call them Christophanies where we see Jesus Christ physically manifested to humanity prior to his incarnation or what we commonly call the Christmas story.

When you look at the passages regarding the angel of the LORD, he speaks on behalf of the Lord, he does things like absolve sin that are reserved for the Lord, and so tonight I believe it is completely applicable to claim that many if not all of these passages referring to the angel of the LORD, we have what we call the pre-incarnate Jesus, we have God himself showing up to humanity.

Now let me bring this full circle here. Why is this important to the story that we read? David had sinned. I'm gonna go all the way back to the original story. He had messed up. He had gone out on his own. He had gotten caught up in the flesh. What did he do? When he sinned, he confessed his sin. Who was it in this story that showed up on the scene? The angel of the LORD. The reason that is strategic even though this is a story that took place a thousand years before the incarnation, even though this is a story that takes place with a character known as the angel of the LORD, what we see happening in David's life is the result of sin was stopped and stayed by the angel of the LORD and restoration was implemented by the angel of the LORD, and those, my friends, are the things that all of us are craving and wanting but only Jesus Christ can provide.

If you'll allow me to transition to the events of today, everybody is looking for answers from every single direction. We're looking to health care professionals, we're looking to economic experts, we're looking to people of wisdom and insight, and yet ultimately at the end of the day the only person that could solve David's sin problem was a person who the Bible presents a pretty clear case as the Lord himself. You and I are living in very uncertain days, uncertain times, in fact, to be honest with ourselves, we've got more questions than we have answers. You know, maybe in the midst of all that is happening, maybe you and I will find ourselves much like David, in a time of great pestilence, would we just cry out to God, "Help." Would we cry out to God, "We need you." Would we cry out to God, "We need you to infuse yourself into this situation." You see, it is not accidental, in fact, it is providential that this was one of the passages that we read this week. We have a human being who sins against God, who I believe is a representative or an identification that only God himself could solve the problem.

I know today we're looking to medicine, and rightfully so, we're looking to those of wisdom, rightfully so, but you know, the greatest problem of humanity is not a global pandemic, the greatest problem of humanity is not an economy that seems to be in a freefall, the greatest need of humanity is not how far do we keep ourselves from each other and how often do we wash our hands. The greatest need of humanity is we need our sin problem resolved and fixed and only Jesus Christ can do it, and we see a picture of

that in 1 Chronicles 21 with the person of the angel of the LORD. The most important question is: has that been an reality in your own life?

I realize tonight we find ourselves very distant. This room is empty, it's just actually me, a camera in your living room or kitchenette or wherever you find yourself tonight, but maybe that person who's never cried out unto the Lord, the Bible says whoever calls unto the Lord will be saved, maybe you're that person who's never admitted that they were a sinner and asked Jesus to save them. Maybe tonight's the night where you drop to your knees and you take care of business. Maybe tonight you're already a believer. I mean, after all it is Sunday evening and statistically speaking probably more believers are watching than non-believers, but maybe you've gotten caught up in the world, maybe you've gotten caught up in all the hype of the world and you've been looking to everything but Jesus for the answers. You know, maybe tonight's one of those nights where you just kind of wash your hands, no pun intended, and say, "I'm done with doing it the world's way. I'm ready to do it God's way." That's what David did in this passage and it's what we need to do as well.

If you're one of those individuals who needs to have a conversation with someone, talk this out, maybe you've got questions, maybe you want to be prayed with or prayed for, please contact us. As I've mentioned so many times, even though we're not gathered together as a large crowd, First Baptist, Opelika, we're still in business to do the business of the Lord in your life. We're here for you. We want to talk with you. We want you to reach out to us and vice versa. Reach out, let us know. We'd love to have a conversation with you. Maybe you need to be prayed with, prayed for, we'd be glad to do so. But more than anything tonight, if the Lord is stirring your heart about who Jesus needs to be in your life, just call out to him. It's real simple, just admit that you're the problem and Jesus is the answer. Just cry out to him and say, "God, I know I'm a sinner and you're the Savior. Save me tonight." The Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Tonight I realize that our environment is much different than normal. I also mentioned at the very beginning that we're taking strides to see how we're gonna roll out or have an exit strategy for the days ahead, but between now and then please reach out to us. Please communicate with us so that we can know how we can help you with spiritual and/or even physical needs.

I addressed this morning and I want to close tonight by again quoting 1 Thessalonians 4:18, "Comfort one another with these words." We're living in days of great discomfort. It's uncomfortable to walk around these days. We don't know who we're walking around and what we may be walking in the midst thereof. The only comfort that we're gonna find in the days of a global pandemic is the comfort of God's word and I know that this is an experience that's very different, I know it's kind of an elongated Bible teaching, but to be quite honest with you, this is what we need right now. I implore you if you haven't already, be a part of the Bible reading plan. If you say, "Well, I've gotten behind by 3 or 4 months." It's okay. Just pick up where you left off. It's available online, it's available on

the app. Read along with us so that when we gather next week, no matter what that looks like, we'll allow the Lord to teach us from his word.

You know, if you were to go back a couple weeks ago and say there is no way that the book of 1 Chronicles could give me comfort in the midst of a global pandemic, hopefully today these two messages have showed you otherwise. We see from the word of God even if it's a list of names and places that we can hardly pronounce, that God has a timely comforting message for us no matter what we're walking through, and in the days ahead let me encourage you to walk through what we know as 1 & 2 Chronicles with us. We're gonna see persons who deal with God and reject God and we're gonna learn valuable lessons from them in the days ahead. The true comfort that you can get in the days ahead of great uncertainty is from the word of God. We encourage you to read it, we encourage you to study it, and when made available be a part of us so we can study it together. Take what the Lord has given you, pass it on to your children, pass it on to those that are friends and family members. Make the study of this morning and tonight a regular part of your conversation in the days ahead.

Again, let me remind you as we close we're here for you. We're not having large gatherings but First Baptist, Opelika, is still the church and we want to be the church in your life as well. So with that being said, tonight we're gonna say goodnight from a very empty sanctuary here at First Baptist, Opelika, but just remember office hours are the same, all of our ministerial staff is here. We're here to help you as we navigate these waters. With that being said, goodnight and God bless.