

Revelation - Part 3 - Sermon Manuscript

Title: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible

Question: How “supernatural” is our own worldview?

Today I’d like to point something out that I’m hoping will help us as we study the rest of Revelation. Look at Revelation 1:1...

Revelation 1:1 - The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John

Think about that for a second... God sent an *angel* to John.

That might not sound earth shattering at first, but if we’re honest, it might feel a bit weird.

- We’re okay with the Christmas story where there were a few angel appearances.
- We’re okay with angels coming to Jesus and helping Him after fasting for 40 days and nights in the desert.
- We’re even okay with the angel that went to the tomb of Jesus and rolled back the stone covering the entrance, and then sat on it!

But I’ve come to realize over the past several years that even though I grew up as a Christian and went to church my whole life, I realized that I hadn’t taken the supernatural worldview of the Bible seriously enough.

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What do I mean by worldview? I just mean how I see the world... how would I explain things that are happening around me. I naturally hesitate to believe supernatural explanations - Why? It’s because of our Western culture.

And so, several years ago my thinking in this was challenged. I realized that if I wanted to better understand God’s Word, then I needed to recover the

supernatural worldview of the biblical writers. I needed to be willing to see in my life things that to them were just the reality of life!

And that's something I'm still working on!

So one principle that's helped me when reading the Bible is this...

If it's weird, it's probably important

So, what are some weird things in the Bible?

Well... Angels, demons, the Angel of the LORD, little "g" gods like Ba'al, Chemosh Asherah, Dagon and Molech (all of which are mentioned in the Bible), spiritual forces of evil...

To our Western ears, these things sound more like science fiction than reality. I think that's because our supernatural worldview is more informed by what we see on TV than the Bible.

Speaking for myself - If you had asked me several years ago about spiritual beings in the Bible, I might have said, "*Sure, there's angels and demons... you know, the good guys and the bad guys.*" But that's just way too simplistic.

So, I'm hoping this morning will serve as sort of a starting point to better understand that there really is a whole heavenly host of spiritual beings, some are good, some are bad, and they don't all do the same things - they have different jobs to do, and one of those jobs is the job of an angel...

The Old Testament Hebrew word for angel is *malak*, which means "messenger." And so the divine "messengers" we see in the Old Testament are spiritual beings just doing their job - They bring messages from Yahweh God to His people.

Genesis 18 is a great example! This is where Abraham was sitting by his tent one day, just minding his own business, and three "men" appeared standing near him. He recognized one of the three as the LORD - Yahweh God. As it turned

out, they had a message. They said that his wife, Sarah, would have a son by the following year.

Sarah overheard them talking and just laughed to herself because she was too old for childbearing at this point.

Later on we see these “men” walking with Abraham as they were about to leave. This is when Yahweh God tells Abraham that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were about to be judged because of their sins. But notice the conversation... First the LORD speaks to the other two with Him; then He speaks to Abraham...

Genesis 18:16 - When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way.

Genesis 18:17-18 - Then the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? 18 Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.

Genesis 18:19 - For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”

Genesis 18:20-21 - Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous 21 that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.”

Notice what happens next...

Genesis 18:22 - *The men* turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD.”

Yahweh just said that He would go down... but actually, it's the other two “men” that go! These two guys act as *representatives* of Yahweh God - which by the way, we'll see this representative theme come up in future sermons throughout Revelation...

So, in Genesis 18, we've got Abraham and these three visitors that so far are only described as "men." But then we see Abraham speak to one of the men as if he was speaking to Yahweh God Himself. Abraham recognized Him (Which makes sense because he's spoken to Yahweh God several times prior to this visit).

So, we have Abraham and Yahweh God, but who are the other two? Chapter 19 answers that question...

Genesis 19:1 - *The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot [Abraham's nephew] was sitting in the gateway of the city.*

The two "men" were angels! They looked like "men," but they were actually spiritual beings that had the job of a messenger, which is why they're called angels. They're like supernatural mail carriers!

Again, the word 'angel' is just a job description. There are other jobs that spiritual beings loyal to Yahweh God have...

Some are "ministers"...

Psalm 103:20-21 (ESV) - Bless the LORD, O you his angels [*malak*], you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word! Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers [*mesortay*], who do his will!

Angels and ministers are two different job descriptions. Granted, some spiritual beings might perform both jobs.

You might be thinking, "*Yeah but didn't angels come to minister to Jesus after He fasted for 40 days and nights in the desert?*" Yes! But by the time we get to the New Testament, the word "angel" becomes a catch-all term for spiritual beings loyal to Yahweh.

Maybe that's where our confusion comes in? But in the Old Testament, the Hebrew language makes it clear that spiritual beings do more than just send messages.

Another job (or role) that spiritual beings could have is called a “Watcher.”

This is a rare term in the Old Testament. It only shows up 3x, all of which are in Daniel 4. This one is a little more difficult to nail down, but the Hebrew word means exactly what you would think: To watch and remain alert. There’s also...

cherubim and seraphim. These guys are described like Yahweh God’s throne guardians. These are the only spiritual beings in the bible that are described as having wings.

Some of you know that I like to joke about the fact that angels don’t have wings - cherubim and seraphim do, but angels? Nope!

Isaiah says that seraphim have 6 wings...

Isaiah 6:1-2 - ...I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.

We see these guys in Revelation...

Revelation 4:6-7 - In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. 7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.

Revelation 4:8 - Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: “‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,’ who was, and is, and is to come.”

[Blank] These guys aren’t angels - they’re cherubim and seraphim - aka: throne guardians. Why does God need throne guardians? I think it might be so that no one gets too close.

Whatever the reason... back to my point: There's more than just angels and demons. That's just too simplistic. But if you're like me and that's what you thought for years - then to quote a wise old Jedi Master: "*We must unlearn what we have learned!*"

According to the Bible: Yahweh God has a heavenly host of spiritual beings loyal to Him and that serve Him in multiple ways. Just like us, they've got jobs to do.

And, *like us*, they've got free will - they can think and act on their own. They have their own ideas. In 1 Kings 22 we see an example of a divine council of spiritual beings offering God ideas on what to do next!

And, *like us*, they are part of God's family. And we even know a couple of them by name!

Luke 1:26 tells us that God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth to tell Mary that she's going to have a son, she's to name Him Jesus, and He will be called the Son of God.

Gabriel's also mentioned in the book of Daniel. But he's not the only one mentioned in Daniel... There's also a high ranking spiritual being named Michael.

Daniel 10:1 - In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel...

This "revelation" ... this *unveiled message*... was about a great supernatural war. Daniel says that what he saw was so terrifying, that his face turned deathly pale and all his strength left him - he said he felt completely helpless and alone, and just dropped to the ground.

But someone reached out to Daniel... and whoever this is, they look an awful lot like how John describes Jesus in Revelation 1! He touches Daniel on the shoulder and gives him strength so that he could stand back up.

Then he started explaining to Daniel that he'd been held up for 21 days because he was fighting the prince of the Persian kingdom.

Daniel 10:13 - But the prince [sar] of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes [sarim], came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia.

The Hebrew word here for prince is “sar” (sarim is plural). “sar” means “supernatural being.” And here we have Micheal referred to as one of the *chief* supernatural beings! The New Testament letter of Jude calls Michael an archangel - that just means he’s got a high rank in the army of God - chief.

Then a couple chapters later...

Daniel 12 says that Michael is the great supernatural being that protects Daniel’s people - the Israelites. In other words, Michael is the chief “angel” over the nation of Israel!

So, okay... If Michael is this Archangel over Israel, are there other supernatural beings in charge of the other nations? Well... It would seem so!

Deuteronomy 32:7 (ESV) - Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you.

Deuteronomy 32:8-9 - When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. 9 But the LORD’s portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.

When did the LORD divide all mankind? He did that in Genesis 11 with the Tower of Babel event. That’s when He made everyone speak different languages and He scattered them throughout the world.

And when He did, He set up boundaries ... These would be the borders for the nations. And He set up these nations according to the number of the sons of God.

Your Bible might say “sons of Israel” or “children of Israel.” That’s because the translators chose to use the Masoretic Text as their source.

The Masoretic Texts were what the Church used for centuries because they were the oldest known sources of the Bible (this is the oldest example we have dating back to 929AD)...

The Masoretic Texts were our oldest sources of the Bible that we had until the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1947. A lot of texts were found in the caves near the Dead Sea, and some were part of the Greek Old Testament - aka the Septuagint.

The Greek Septuagint sources we now have are more than 1000 years older than any of the oldest Masoretic Texts. I’ve talked about the Septuagint before - about 75% of the time a New Testament writer refers to the Old Testament, they’re using the Septuagint.

Back to Deuteronomy 32:8 - the Septuagint doesn’t say, “sons of Israel.” It says “sons of God.” Which honestly makes sense, because Israel wasn’t even a nation during the time of Genesis 11.

The phrase “sons of God” is a phrase in the Old Testament that always refers to spiritual beings - like Michael (he’s a *bene elohim*)

So, as one of the chief spiritual beings, Michael was appointed over Israel once they became a nation and had land of their own.

What about the other nations and sons of God?

If the Septuagint is right (and I think it is), then the other nations had spiritual beings appointed over them, but some of these spiritual beings became corrupt.

In Deuteronomy 4:19 (ESV), Moses warns the Israelites to not bow down to the stars (the host of heaven) that Yahweh God had apportioned to all the nations.

And if we were to read the rest of the Old Testament, we’d find that’s exactly what they ended up doing ... many times! And so, because the Israelites become

disloyal to Yahweh God, they're judged... But the people of Israel aren't the only ones judged!

In Psalm 82 we see Yahweh God judging the corrupt spiritual beings (*elohim*) that were appointed over the nations...

Psalm 82:1 (ESV) - God [*elohim*] has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods [*elohim*] he holds judgment.

Then, in the rest of the Psalm, Yahweh God rakes them over the coals. He says...

Psalm 82:6 - "You are gods [*elohim*], sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince [*sarim*]." Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations!"

Some would say that Yahweh God was judging earthly kings here. I think it makes more sense that the *elohim* being judged were the sons of God that were appointed over the nations, but then somewhere along the way started accepting worship, which is what Moses warned the Israelites about in Deuteronomy 4.

And by the way - all the little-g gods mentioned in our Bibles are not demons. Demons are low level bad guys in the supernatural realm - that's a topic for another time. But in Ephesians 6:12...

[Ephesians 6:12 and other passages] The Apostle Paul calls the higher ranking corrupt sons of God rulers, authorities, powers, and his catch-all term: the spiritual forces of evil.

So, that should tell us that Satan isn't the only bad-guy in the Bible. He's one of many. But the Bible does describe him as sort of this chief bad guy.

Okay... so how does all of this help us better understand Revelation?!

If you remember from previous weeks - or if you've read Revelation chapter 1 - then you know that Jesus wanted John to write to seven *real churches*. These

churches aren't symbolic of anything - they're historic churches that existed during the time John wrote. So Jesus said to John...

Revelation 1:19 - "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later."

Revelation 1:20 - "The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven *lampstands* are the seven *churches*."

Those angels are actually seven *different* angels.

Like the spiritual beings that were appointed over the nations in the Old Testament, these seven spiritual beings are appointed over the seven churches listed in Revelation. And they had the same goal that we talked about last week...

As the Church and members of the Kingdom of God, we're to be set apart from the rest of the world. We are the LORD's treasured possession. We're to be a kingdom of priests. We're to point the rest of the world back to Jesus! He's now the only one with real authority over all the nations!

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Okay, so does this mean that the LORD appointed an angel over Refton Church?

I don't know? If He did, I can say I've never met him. But I guess it's possible! And if that's true, wouldn't that be cool? Wouldn't that be something, to know that a member of the LORD's divine council watches over us?!

And to that point - we often pray for the LORD's protection... (illustration)

So, do we have an angel appointed over Refton Church? It's possible! But unfortunately we can't know for sure. But what we can say for sure is that these seven churches in Revelation had real angels appointed over them.

So if you look at Revelation chapters 2 and 3, you'll see seven letters written to the seven churches. And at the beginning of each letter Jesus says...

“To the *angel* of the church in _____ write:”

Your bible might have a footnote where it says ‘angel’. It'll say that “angel” could just mean the pastor of the church. But the problem is, that's not what the Greek text says.

It doesn't say “pastor” or “shepherd” (Gk = *poimen*, which means shepherd or Christian leader). The Greek says *angelo*... which is where we get the English word “angel.”

angelo = angel - occurs 77x in Revelation. 70 of those are definitely referring to spiritual beings. The other 7 are here in chapters 2 and 3 with the churches.

Your footnote might also say that angel can mean “messenger.” That's true, but is that what Jesus really means in chapters 2 and 3? Is Jesus telling John to literally hand deliver this message to an angel? Can John even do that?

I think the best explanation is that the angels appointed over the seven churches are lumped in with the churches themselves. So to say, “write to the angel of the church in Ephesus,” is like saying: *Write to everyone loyal to Jesus in Ephesus.*

After all, verse 1 says write to the angel of the church, but then verse 7 says...

Revelation 2:7 - “Whoever has ears, let them hear what *the Spirit* says to *the churches.*”

Again, it seems to me that these letters are written to the spiritual beings *and* the human beings loyal to Jesus.

So, why does this matter?

[Blank] The physical world we see is not all there is. There is an unseen realm. There are spiritual beings loyal to Jesus, and there are spiritual beings who are actively rebelling against Him.

There is supernatural warfare that happens all around us in the unseen realm.

Think about it this way:

As one Kingdom increases, the other decreases. That's spiritual warfare. There's the kingdom of darkness, and the Kingdom of light - God's family makes up the Kingdom of light.

And so the Church and spiritual beings loyal to Jesus are to be actively engaged in the jobs that God has for us. There's a much bigger picture going on all around us - the question is: Are we awake? Are we alert and ready to be active participants in God's family and mission?

Look at this...

- **Jesus said (Mark 13:33) - Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.** [the time when Jesus will return]
- **Paul said (Ephesians 6:18, the spiritual warfare passage) - And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.**
- **Peter said (1 Peter 5:8-9) - Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.**

[Blank] May these words be a stark reminder that we're part of something bigger than ourselves! We're part of the mission to expand the Kingdom and family of God. **Let's Pray**