

Tom Ruggirello - Gabriel's Duty

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And I have to tell you, from time to time, I enjoy thinking about what the spirit world may be like, and of course, we can't really know much about it while we're still in the flesh. But we do get a small glimpse into that world when we study the angels and what their roles are in God's universe. Now, this surprised me, but angels are mentioned more than 300 times in the Scriptures, and they're extensively employed by God in far more ways than we are aware of. Hebrews 12:22 speaks of an innumerable company of angels.

And we read this in Revelation 5:11, and I beheld, I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the number of them was 10,000 times 10,000 and thousands of thousands. God created millions of angels to do his bidding. We don't know what they all do, as I said. But, you know, it's a very big universe, and we just have an inkling of the power that they possess.

Now, we know that the universe is controlled by fixed laws and principles, so it keeps itself in balance without the need for intervention. But maybe there's something out there the angels are assigned to cover. Now, on many occasions, our scientists have observed stars colliding and supernovae explode. So it's possible that they have a part in overseeing the universe and keeping a special eye on this special home called the Earth. Or maybe they're busy preparing other places for future creations that God has in store.

Whatever it is that they do, we know that God does not create life in vain, nor does he appreciate laziness. So they're not just out there sitting on a cloud playing harps, as they're often depicted. They were created for a purpose, and someday we will know exactly what their various roles are. But one thing we do know is that they sing.

The text in Revelation 5 describes them singing around the throne of God, and I wonder, well, should we take that literally? Well, if we do, try to imagine the sound of 100 million angels singing together in perfect harmony, and then we have God's discussion with Job. God asked him, where was thou when I laid the foundation of the earth, whereupon other foundations are of fastened?

Or who laid the cornerstone thereof? When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy, Wouldn't you like have liked to hear all that? Now, we generally regard the morning stars as the Logos and the Lucifer singing together, while the sons of God refer to the countless hosts of angels, and so as they looked at the finished earth, they sang, they shouted for joy, knowing that this was going to be a special place where new, intelligent life would be created, and I think as they watched all this, it was an exciting time to know what was going to happen here, that God took special attention on this earth.

Now, though their abilities are not fully described in the scriptures, from a human standpoint, they are far beyond our capabilities. For example, in Elisha's day, the entire Syrian army was struck with blindness just like that, and in Hezekiah's time, One angel slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. So these are powerful beings, and then, on the other side of that coin, there was the occasion when an angel appeared to Jacob in a dream.

How do you do that without some special power inside? One of the special duties that God has assigned to the angels is the protection of his covenant people. David wrote this. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. The word encamp means to pitch a tent.

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Think of that. If you are in covenant relationship with God, your guardian angel has pitched a tent around you.

Now, that doesn't necessarily stop every painful experience. In fact, we know it doesn't because we're also being developed as new creatures. But what it does mean is that when the Lord determines that there is a spiritual benefit to our experience, he will allow it, and when there is something that will deter us and hurt us spiritually, he prevents it.

Remember, when correcting the Corinthian brethren who are rich, living rich, luxurious lives, the Apostle Paul made it clear that the angels were watching. He said this, for I think God hath set forth us, the apostles last of all, as men doomed to death. For we are made a spectacle unto the world, both to angels and to men. There the word spectacle means a place for public show, a theater. Now, unlike the Corinthian brethren, who were living like the kingdom had already come, all sacrificial life was being closely watched by the angels.

And I am sure that they appreciated someone living in this sinful world. How he could be so divided, devoted to God despite all the sin around him. They learned by watching. Now we know that they're not learning by experience like we are. They're learning by observation.

So that observation is crucial even for their own education, and when they see a saint sacrificing, they are thrilled because they know who God is. They've been in his presence. They know how deserving he is of our worship and praise. You know, I've heard brethren say that someday they would love to sit down with their guardian angel and review all the experiences of this life.

And if that's true, if that, if we will be given that opportunity, what a sweet experience that will be, and I am sure that they will have a lot to share with each one of us and they will give us their view on our experience, and so we'll be able to get a perspective that may have been very different than our own, and I think that will be of great value and blessing to us, kind of rounding up, rounding out the whole experience for us. So, brethren, as we sit in the convention this week, we should know that we're not alone.

Countless angels thrill to the same precious truths that touch your heart. Although we're told about this vast number of angelic hosts, in reality only three angels are named in the Scriptures. Michael, of course, is named. He's named five times, three times in Daniel, once in Jude, and once in Revelation. The angel Gabriel appears four times, twice in Daniel, twice in Luke, and of course, Lucifer is named once in Isaiah.

We're not going to talk about him too much, except once Michael is termed the archangel in Jude 1:9. The word means chief angel, and of course, the existence of a chief angel suggests that there's a hierarchy amongst angelic hosts. The name Michael means who is like God, and although we're not told that Michael is a descriptive title of Jesus, the connection I think is very, very strong.

In Malachi 3:1 we read about a messenger of the covenant, and in equating Michael with Jesus, Brother Russell writes this. From what we learn of his pre human glory, we conclude that he must have been chief messenger. Surely we may well reason that Jehovah's firstborn, the beginning of the creation of God, would be the chief, and the thought gathers force as we remember that he was the only begotten of the Father, the only being whom Jehovah directly created, and in this sense the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and ending of Jehovah's creation, who was before all things, and by whom as Jehovah's agent all things consist.

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Without him was not anything made that was made. Sure the chief messenger would be a fitting title for this being.

So being chief messenger suggests that of all the beings in the universe, he was only subservient to Jehovah. His submissive role to Jehovah is clear in the text. In Jude 1:9 it says, Yet Michael the Archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, does not bring against him a railing accusation. But said the Lord rebuke thee. At first I thought, why would the devil want the body of Moses.

And I thought, well, the likely reason is that he wanted to make an object of worship of that body, knowing how Israel felt about him, and so Michael was sent to prevent that from happening. But Michael's refusal to even accuse Satan I found very interesting. He had every right to accuse him. He knew who he was.

He had sung with him in the past. But he doesn't accuse him. He leaves that to God. So here we see that even the archangel freely submits to the authority of God, final judgment in these matters he places in Jehovah's hands. In describing the role of Michael, John 1:1 says, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a God being.

The Word suggests to me that every time an unnamed angel conveyed a message to someone in the Old Testament, it was probably Michael. That was his role. He was the Word of God, and if that's the case, I think we see a very nice demonstration of humility in all these examples. Sharing his name was simply not important because his only purpose was to convey a message from the heavenly Father.

So here the chief angel, the second mightiest being in the universe, doesn't even say his name, and brethren, there is a sweet lesson in that of how few angelic names are made for you and me. Our purpose in life should never be about magnifying ourselves, our own name, or even wanting recognition for ourselves. The only thing that should concern us is that God's name is honored, that his will is done, and that his message is shared. This is not about us.

Michael's appearance in the book of Daniel is interesting. There he is named, and the reason is probably to help distinguish him from the angel Gabriel, who is also named. So why are these two names given? Gabriel had been sent to explain the prophecies previously he gave to Daniel.

Now, in this instance, however, Gabriel was. You remember in Daniel, he was delayed from coming and explaining the reason why he couldn't get to Daniel. He says this. He says, the prince of the kingdom of persia withstood me one and 20 days. But lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, and I remained there with the kings of Persia.

Now, Young's Literal Translation says, michael, one of the chief princes, should meet, should read michael, first of the chief princes, and so that's consistent with Michael being superior to all other angels. Now, various translations. This is a fascinating text, by the way, that takes a lot more study than we're going to have time for here. But it's even hard to picture precisely what's happening?

There's clearly a struggle between a fallen angel, possibly Satan himself, and Gabriel, and Gabriel couldn't make it to Earth because this other fallen angel was preventing him, and so Michael was sent to assist Gabriel and then Gabriel was free to come to Daniel. However, that that brief glimpse into the spirit world suggests that there are spiritual forces out there that occasionally battle, and so it's kind of lifting the curtain just a little bit to give us a hint of what the other side is like.

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Gabriel's 21 day struggle means that there are some fallen angels who are more powerful than good angels. In this case, I think it was actually Satan, and so Satan was more powerful than Gabriel. Now there's an interesting question that comes up here. If Michael was the appointed mouthpiece, the word of God, why on two other occasions was Gabriel sent to convey God's message?

Now a thought that really appeals to me was shared by brother Eugene Burns many years ago. He suggested that in those cases it was inappropriate for Michael to convey the forthcoming messages. I thought, why in the world would it ever be inappropriate for Michael to convey a message from God? And the answer may become evident when we examine what was different about the message that Gabriel gave to Daniel, and when we do, we will see that Michael was the solution to the troubling visions given to Daniel.

Let's just take a quick look. You know all these prophecies, they're wonderful, they prove the inspiration of the Bible. But let's look at them from a little bit different perspective. In chapter eight, Daniel receives a vision of what was to transpire in the future, and in the vision there he sees a two horn goat, a two horned ram, which Gabriel later explained represented the kingdom of Medo, Persia.

That kingdom would be the next dominating power following Babylon, which was the power current in Daniel's day, and then in his vision, there appeared a hairy goat with a single great horn that struck the ram and cast it to the ground. Gabriel told Daniel that the goat represented Greece and that the horn was its most powerful king, and that's a simple thing to prove in history. History tells us that Alexander the Great, head of the Grecian Empire, when he conquered Medo, Persia became the next dominant power.

And for Daniel, of course, unfortunately, this meant that Gentile dominion over Israel was going to continue, and then as the Grecian goat waxed straight, it says the horn was broken off, depicting Alexander's surprise death at 32 or 33 years of age, when he was at the height of his power, and from that four horns grew to take the place of that one great horn. Each horn represented one of Alexander's four generals who vied for power after his death and eventually divided the kingdom between them. There's an excellent talk by brother Matt Carey on this showing that this is the only time in history where a son of the king does not take the place.

And so the fact that four men took the place of Alexander the Great is extraordinary. It's different. There's nothing else in history that conveys this, and his point was this shows the inspiration of the Bible and I like that. I think that's great.

And then from one of those horns, one of those four horns, another little horn grew and get waxed. Very great, and of course history confirms that out of General Cassander, who controlled Macedonia, the power of the Roman empire grew to dominate the world and again exert control over Israel. Remember, that's Daniel's concern. Gabriel then describes even another little horn that grows out of the Roman horn.

He says it would be fierce and powerful and would destroy many, and that power, this is significant, would stand against the prince princes. In other words, out of the Roman Empire would come a power that would stand against Christ, the true prince. Gabriel also said that this little horn would take away the daily sacrifice which created the great antichrist system, and the true sanctuary he says, would be trodden underfoot for 2300 days.

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Now it's interesting that this timing of wasn't specifically explained to Daniel except in these broad terms, and then Daniel was told to shut up the vision for it shall be for many days, and with Dan, with that, Daniel was sick at heart. Knowing that this was a long term prophecy, Michael was to be the solution. Gabriel left Daniel, but he soon returned to help explain and comfort him.

Because Daniel didn't know what this was all about, and here we see why Michael was not the one sharing the vision or the meaning. Because like I said, Michael was to be the solution to these terrible events of history, and then Gabriel went on to give Daniel the prophecy of the 70 weeks which indicated not only when the temple in Jerusalem would be rebuilt, that was Daniel's immediate concern again, but even more important when the Messiah would come.

You know that as the first part of that prophecy indicated, the first seven weeks or 49 years would complete the rebuilding of the temple. Like I said, that was Daniel's concern. But Michael would come to offer himself in sacrifice not only to rid the world of these unholy empires, but also to cleanse the world of the great light of sin. You know, these were exciting truths the angels were learning every time they were given, and I think Gabriel thrilled to give these words to Daniel.

There was no greater honor that an angel could have been given than to point to our Messiah with that time prophecy. Now, along with the other angels, Gabriel had witnessed the fall of man. They had witnessed creation, they had witnessed the fall of man. They saw the suffering that came with it, and now he was sent to reveal when the Savior would come.

You know, I mentioned that it was brother Eugene Burns who shared why he thought it was Gabriel who shared these visions. His comment has stuck with me for many years. He said that sending Gabriel instead of Michael suggests heavenly decorum. The word decorum describes proper conduct in certain situations. Using Michael to announce prophecies that related to his own sacrifice may have been considered inappropriate by God.

And so we take this large view of Gabriel's message. We put these all together and we see that he provided the 70 weeks time prophecy leading to the Messiah. He previously described the development of gentile powers that eventually would be controlled by a single power that stood against the Prince of princes himself, and that Jesus continual sacrifice would be desecrated by the Church's institution of the Mass, a false sacrifice that considered the real sacrifice of no value. So brethren, it was appropriate to send Michael to convey these messages because they were all related to.

No, I'm sorry, I said that wrong. It was appropriate to send Gabriel, if I get that right, to convey these messages because they were all related to Michael in some way. Now, as we step back and we see these prophecies in Daniel all together, we can understand that the answer to the misuse of power, the suppression of Israel and the general evil they brought into this world will be dealt with through Christ, the true Prince of this world. Using Gabriel to convey these vital messages calls to mind Proverbs 27:2. Let another praise you and not your own mouth, a stranger and not your own lips.

Now, Gabriel wasn't a stranger, but the principle conveyed here in Proverbs is consistently applied even to Michael the Archangel.

Gabriel's next appearance wasn't until centuries later, and it was required again due to heavenly decorum. Remember, these are wonderful stories. Gabriel's first New Testament appearances in Luke, chapter one. There was in the days of Herod, the King of Judea, a certain priest named

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Zacharias.

And his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth, and they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. Blameless. Now they had no child because Elizabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord, and there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him, and the angel said unto him, fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John, and thou shalt have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink, and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb.

And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God, and he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord, and Zacharias said to the angel, whereby shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years, and the angel answering said to him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God, and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad things tidings.

And behold, thou shalt be dumb and not able to speak until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words which shall be fulfilled in their season, and the people waited for Zacharias and marveled that he tarried so long in the temple, and when he came out, he could not speak unto them, and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple. For he beckoned unto them and remained speechless.

I'll tell you, brethren, Zacharias probably considered himself a very practical man. He was now old, his wife was old and barren. So what Gabriel said just didn't fit the practical side of who he was, and as a result of his practicality, Gabriel was to be dumb. One commentary says this.

So the original word dumb signifies death as well as dumb, and it seems plain that he was as unable to hear as he was to speak, for his friends were obliged to make signs to him that he might understand them. I like that. But I'll tell you, lest we be too hard on Zacharias. Once he realized that Gabriel's words were true, his attitude through the whole experience was amazing, wonderful.

You know that it was traditional to name a Son after his father, and that's what everyone expected in this case. But Gabriel had told Zacharias to name the boy John, meaning the grace or mercy of Jehovah, and after the birth and circumcision of John, Zacharias's hearing and speech are restored. Verse 64 says, and his mouth was opened immediately and his tongue loosed, and he spake and praised God.

But we want to stop here, and I want you to listen to the excitement and joy of this old man. He went on to say this. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, and he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swear to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him

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without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life, and then Zacharias speaks to his son, little baby he's holding in his arms.

And thou, child, shall be called the prophet of the highest. For thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the day spring from on high visited us to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Brethren, this man knew his scriptures. He understood the need for redemption. He knew the focus and importance of the Abrahamic promise and the meaning of deliverance. What a blessing that we see his real heart, that we have more than the fear in the temple. We see his real heart and his faith in what God promised long ago.

And so we should remember him by this, not his initial skepticism. This was his real heart. What a privilege he was given to know that his Son would prepare the way for our Lord. You know, brethren, we all take special joy in our children, I'm sure. But to know ahead of time that your son would someday do this meaningful work of preparing the people he loved for the coming Messiah must have brought great satisfaction to this devoted man, the Lord, along with Gabriel and the other angels.

I think they loved his response. How could you not? It was so perfect, and I think they shared the enthusiasm for what was now unfolding in this world, salvation was coming to earth. Well, as you know, six months later, Gabriel would again appear, this time to Mary, in what have been one of the most memorable experiences of Gabriel's life.

And in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary, and the angel came into in unto her and said, hail thou, that out highly favored the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women, and when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind manner of salutation this should be, and the angel said unto her, fear not, Mary, for thou has found favor with God.

And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son and shall call his name Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the highest, and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then Mary said unto the angel, how shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

And the angel answered and said unto her, the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the highest shall overshadow thee. Therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God, and behold thy cousin Elizabeth. She had also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren, and Mary said, behold, the handmaid of the Lord, Be it unto me according to thy word.

And the angel departed. Now, unlike Zacharias, who at first didn't believe Gabriel, Mary's question was was a technical one rather than a sign of disbelief, and once it was explained that a miracle would take place in her, she gladly accepted it, and she recognized herself as a servant, a handmaid of the Lord, and I think in this sweet, humble response, we once again see the type of people that God chooses to reveal his message.

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Humble, gladly, accepting God's will for them and willing to serve whatever he asks of them.

When Jesus was finally born in Bethlehem, you know, an angel was sent to announce that birth to the shepherds. Now, in this case, the angel is not named. But again, since Michael is not available at this point, I think the angel who was speaking was Gabriel.

And the angel said unto them, fear not. You notice how many times he says fear not. Every time he speaks to a human, he starts by saying, fear not. So there must be something that would make them fear, but it's very comforting. He says, fear not.

Behold, I bring a good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David the Savior, which is Christ the Lord, and this shall be a sign unto you. Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in the manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly hosts praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, good will toward men. That hasn't happened yet, but it will.

When Gabriel sang with the other angels before the shepherds, I am sure his heart overflowed with love and respect for the one who had recently been transformed from the archangel of Heaven to the helpless baby born in Bethlehem. How could he or the other angels not be awed by the humble display that they were witnessing in our Lord? From being the archangel of God to being a helpless baby now born in Bethlehem. Think of the contrast that was. They had witnessed the second greatest being in the universe being transformed and planted into a fallen woman of no reputation in this world.

And then, as her Lord grew, the angels watched the baby become a boy.

They watched with great interest as he began his ministry by water baptism by his cousin John, son of Zacharias. Then they listened intently as Jesus taught and watched as he healed the sick and blessed those who followed him, knowing that that was Jesus heart, and then as his ministry came to an end, their hearts must have ached as he watched him suffer such indignities and agony, knowing that it was all so undeserved and yet willing to suffer for the benefit of others, and finally, brethren, it may have been Gabriel who shared the message with Mary Magdalene as she stood at the empty tomb of Jesus, saying those simple yet profound words, he is not here, for he is risen. Can you imagine the joy that must have brought to him?

Gabriel had shared prophecies that pointed forward to their coming Messiah. He announced the birth of John, who had prepared the way for the Lord, then revealed to Mary that she had been chosen to bear the Son of God. He made an official announcement to the shepherds and sang before them with a host of angels, and now finally announced the empty tomb. Brethren, there are no more events more important in all human history than the ones he was privileged to share, and then to witness the exaltation of Michael the Archangel to the right hand of God, now possessing the very nature of God must have been an awesome experience for all the angels.

Knowing how deserving he was and how much they loved him and knew this was the right thing to do.

The name Gabriel means man of God. A simple name for a member of an extraordinary company of servants, tens of millions who serve God in heaven and on earth, and the fact that we only know

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really this one name besides Michael is astounding lesson from these mighty beings, and yet we know little about them. There's a humble principle that's being conveyed in all that Gabriel and the others did their duty. But, brethren, I imagine it was far more than duty.

And I know that many of you feel the same way.

We serve the Lord knowing how much he's done for us, and we feel an obligation to obey. But for us too, brethren, it's much more than that. The angels understand what a privilege they have for expressing the Lord's will to others, for doing the physical things he asks of them. Brethren, what I take from this is that if we approach our duties in the same way as Gabriel must have felt, with the knowledge and heartfelt joy of Zacharias and with a sweet acceptance of Mary, we too will appreciate what an honor and privilege it is for us to serve God in whatever way he chooses for us. Our service to God is far more than duty.

It's the greatest privilege ever offered to man. Brethren, may we each treasure the services that we are invited to give. Oh, brethren, rather than closing with the usual singing of a hymn, I thought it would be a blessing to close with the selection from Hansel's Messiah. We now go back to Revelation, chapter five, where we previously read about millions of angels singing together. They sang the most meaningful words that I'm sure we all love.

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing and every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea and all that are in them heard I saying, blessing and honor and glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever. So, brethren, as we listen to this, try to imagine the angels singing with us. Because these are human words from a human perspective. But, you know, they have entered into our experience fully. So we're going to close with that.

And then Brother Obi will take the meeting back.