

Angels, Chariots, and the Lord of Hosts

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The title of my presentation is “Angels, Chariots, and the Lord of Hosts.”¹ Please know that I have, through various means, sought for the Spirit of the Lord. Please know also that the Lord’s angels exist and are empowered by Jesus Christ through His infinite Atonement.

The Ministry of Angels

Since the days of Adam and Eve angels have had significant responsibilities in the Lord’s great plan of happiness. Angels figure prominently in ancient and modern scripture. Angels have ministered to or communicated with such notables as Adam, Hagar (see Genesis 16:7–11), Manoah’s wife (see Judges 13:3, 6, 19–21), Daniel, Mary the mother of Jesus (see Luke 1:26–38), Mary Magdalene, Salome, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, other women (see Mark 16:4–6; Luke 24:2–4; John 20:11–12), Peter, Paul, John the Revelator, and many others. Angels have also ministered to Book of Mormon characters, including Nephi (see 1 Nephi 11:14; 2 Nephi 4:24), King Benjamin (see Mosiah 3:2), Alma the Younger (see Mosiah 27:10–11; Alma 8:14), Amulek (see Alma 10:7), Samuel the Lamanite (see Helaman 13:7), and others.

Furthermore, in our own dispensation prophets and apostles have testified of the eminence and considerable standing of angels. In fact, our dispensation has been a period of extraordinary angelic activity. Joseph Smith received dozens of communications from angels. Additional Church authorities and others have been recipients of angelic communications.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was restored, in part, when angels imparted revelations and truths to the Prophet Joseph Smith. A passage in the Doctrine and Covenants summarizes:

The voice of Michael, the archangel; the voice of Gabriel, and of Raphael, and of divers angels, from Michael or Adam down to the present time, all declaring their dispensation, their rights, their keys, their honors, their majesty and glory, and the power of their priesthood. [D&C 128:21]

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Elder Jeffrey R. Holland reminded us that it is appropriate to speak about angels. He wrote, “I believe we need to speak of and believe in and bear testimony of the ministry of angels more than we sometimes do.”²

For a definition of angels, see the Bible Dictionary. In this presentation I will refer to the Lord’s angels unless otherwise stated.

The Angels of the Lord of Hosts

How many angels are there? There are *hosts* of angels. The Old Testament expression “Lord of hosts” sometimes refers to the Lord of hosts of angels. The Bible Dictionary states: “The Lord of Sabaoth was a title of Jehovah; the hosts were the armies of Israel (1 Sam. 17:45), but also included the angelic armies of heaven.”³ Hebrew lexicons agree with this interpretation. One prominent Hebrew lexicon states that the term *Lord of hosts* sometimes refers to “the heavenly beings” of the Lord⁴ or “the heavenly entourage” of the Lord.⁵ Another Hebrew lexicon agrees with this definition, referring to a host as an “(organized body) of angels.”⁶

The title “Lord of hosts” is so important that it is found some 250 times in the Old Testament; Isaiah alone used the term about fifty times. This title, then, is a frequent reminder that the Lord has hosts of angels. How many angels belong to the Lord of hosts of angels? The singular *host*, by definition, refers to “a large number of people or things.”⁷ The plural, *hosts*, multiplies this number. The Lord of hosts of angels refers to immense numbers.

Other passages of scripture also indicate that there are great numbers of the Lord’s angels. For example, Lehi envisioned “God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels” (1 Nephi 1:8). Two passages of scripture—Hebrews 12:22 and Doctrine and Covenants 76:67—use the expression “an innumerable company of angels.” Furthermore, John the Revelator recorded:

And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne . . . : and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. [Revelation 5:11]

Indeed, ten thousand times ten thousand angels, which equals 100 million, symbolizes a great number. To sum up, there are numberless concourses of angels, an innumerable company of angels, and hosts of angels—all of whom are in the service of our Lord and God.

Angels as Agents of Power

Angels are agents of power. Each of the Lord’s angels possesses extraordinary capabilities and powers, making them formidable beings. Their power ultimately exists because of Jesus Christ and His Atonement. Consider the following examples of the power of angels:

When Daniel was cast into the lions’ den, a stone was placed over the den’s opening to prevent Daniel’s escape. Then, to ensure that possible coconspirators with Daniel would not remove the stone without detection, the king and his officers used their signets to seal the stone (see Daniel 6:17). Had the seals been broken during the night, the king and his officers could have claimed deception or trickery on the part of Daniel. But neither the rock nor the seals prevented the angel from entering the den and stopping the lions’ mouths. We note that the angel was not only empowered to save Daniel but that the angel himself was also immune from the lions’ destruction. Because of Daniel’s faith and righteousness, the angel saved him from a horrific death. Daniel would later testify, “My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me” (Daniel 6:22).

We live during a day of wars and rumors of wars. News organizations regularly report conflicts taking place in various parts of the world. However, we as Latter-day Saints should have a high degree of comfort in

knowing the power of the Lord's angels with regard to such conflicts. The Bible sets forth the following account of a powerful angel.

During the reign of King Hezekiah the Assyrian army was advancing toward Jerusalem with the intent of conquering it. With scores of thousands of enemy soldiers camped outside of Jerusalem's gates, waiting to destroy the city's inhabitants, Hezekiah petitioned the Lord through prayer in the temple. In response to Hezekiah's humble prayer, the Lord sent his prophet Isaiah to the king, promising deliverance from the Assyrian army. Soon thereafter "the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand" (Isaiah 37:36; see also Isaiah 37:33–35; 2 Chronicles 32:21). It is sometimes difficult to comprehend such extraordinary dominance: one angel versus some 185,000 disciplined soldiers—and the angel was victorious. Such an angelic operation is permitted only according to the Lord's divine will.

In addition to these two examples of angels operating as agents of power during the Old Testament period, I will provide a modern example of a powerful heavenly messenger in the life of President Harold B. Lee. When President Lee was serving as the president of the Church, he shared an experience that occurred while he and his wife were traveling on an airplane. They had been visiting a mission, and both were impressed to return home earlier than they had planned. As President and Sister Lee were sitting in the airplane, homeward bound, President Lee received a blessing from an unseen person. He related:

As we approached a certain point en route, someone laid his hand upon my head. I looked up; I could see no one. That happened again before we arrived home, again with the same experience. Who it was, by what means or what medium, I may never know, except I knew that I was receiving a blessing that I came a few hours later to know I needed most desperately.

. . . Shortly [after we arrived home], there came massive hemorrhages which, had they occurred while we were in flight, I wouldn't be here today talking about it.

I know that there are powers divine that reach out when all other help is not available. . . . Yes, I know that there are such powers.⁸

The unseen person who gave President Lee a blessing demonstrated extraordinary powers: he remained invisible, he knew where to find President Lee, he knew of President Lee's physical condition and of his need for a blessing, and he blessed the prophet with priesthood power. Additionally, it is my opinion that this unseen person did not board the plane as did other passengers, obtaining a passport, ticket, and boarding pass; showing his photo ID; dealing with airport security; and so forth. It is entirely possible, knowing of the vast power of angels, that this unseen person entered the plane through miraculous means. Such is the way of heavenly beings.

Angels as Protectors of the Righteous

Not only are angels agents of power, but they also serve as protective and reassuring forces for the righteous, as shown by the symbol of chariots of fire. During my research on angels I have collected a number of accounts that feature angels, horses, and chariots of fire. I will now provide a few examples.

We recall from the Old Testament the attempt of Syria's king to capture Elisha. During the night the king surrounded Dothan with soldiers, horses, and chariots. When Elisha's assistant awakened early in the morning, he saw the armies that surrounded the city and cried out to Elisha, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?"

Elisha replied by saying:

Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.

[After this reply,] *Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.* [2 Kings 6:15–17]

This account signifies a demonstration of great power and supremacy—a mountain full of horses and chariots of fire providing courage and protection to Elisha and his servant.

Church authorities and others often liken this account to us. President Henry B. Eyring, for example, provided us with the following encouragement:

I know that the promise of angels to bear us up is real. You might want to bring to memory the assurance of Elisha to his frightened servant. That assurance is ours when we feel close to being overwhelmed in our service. Elisha faced real and terrible opposition. . . .

Like that servant of Elisha, there are more with you than those you can see opposed to you. Some who are with you will be invisible to your mortal eyes.⁹

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland related the account of Elisha and then applied this important story to each of us:

In the gospel of Jesus Christ we have help from both sides of the veil. When disappointment and discouragement strike—and they will—we need to remember that if our eyes could be opened, we would see horses and chariots of fire as far as the eye can see, riding at great speed to come to our protection. They will always be there, these armies of heaven, in defense of Abraham’s seed.¹⁰

The account of Elisha reminds us also of when Elijah and Elisha were walking and talking near the Jordan River, and “there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went

up by a whirlwind into heaven.” When Elisha witnessed this scene, he cried out, “My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof” (2 Kings 2:11–12). For multiple reasons this is a marvelous and incredible show of power: a chariot of fire, horses of fire, and Elijah ascending to heaven in a whirlwind create a magnificent scene.

On April 3, 1836, this same Elijah visited Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple. Joseph wrote, “Another great and glorious vision burst upon us; for Elijah the prophet, who was taken to heaven without tasting death, stood before us” (D&C 110:13).

The protective theme of horses and chariots of fire continues in our day. Some individuals who attended the dedication of the Kirtland Temple beheld angels, horses of fire, and chariots. The Prophet Joseph Smith recorded: “The heavens were opened unto Elder Sylvester Smith, and he, leaping up, exclaimed: ‘The horsemen of Israel and the chariots thereof.’”¹¹

Additionally, Joseph Smith wrote that

Elder Roger Orton saw a mighty angel riding upon a horse of fire, with a flaming sword in his hand, followed by five others, encircle the house [temple], and protect the Saints, even the Lord’s anointed, from the power of Satan and a host of evil spirits, which were striving to disturb the Saints.¹²

This account makes it unmistakable that the angels who encircled the temple did so to protect the Saints from Satan’s host of evil spirits. This account also features angels with swords in their hands—a demonstration of angels’ power to protect us from harm and danger.

Angels with swords are found in the Old Testament as well as in accounts during the Restoration. We are reminded, for instance, that Joseph Smith envisioned

Elder Brigham Young standing in a strange land, in the far south and west, in a desert place, upon a rock in the midst of about a dozen men . . . , who

*appeared hostile. He was preaching to them in their own tongue, and the angel of God standing above his head, with a drawn sword in his hand, protecting him, but he did not see it.*¹³

Angels in This Dispensation

Many of the accounts of angels that I have shared today are exceptional or unique. Most of us will never be protected by an angel in a lions' den, nor will the majority of us be privileged to see horses and chariots of fire. But we should bear in mind that angelic communications are not reserved for those who lived during the ancient periods of the Old Testament or the Book of Mormon, nor are such communications reserved only for prophets, apostles, or notable women such as Hagar or Mary the mother of Jesus. Indeed, several of our Church authorities have clearly taught that we who are laypersons may receive angelic communications according to the divine will of our loving Heavenly Father. To this end I will cite President Boyd K. Packer and Elder Dallin H. Oaks.

President Packer provided the following significant statement:

*Angels attend the rank and file of the Church. . . .
Who would dare to say that angels do not now
attend the rank and file of the Church who—
answer the calls to the mission fields,
teach the classes,
pay their tithes and offerings,
seek for the records of their forebears,
work in the temples,
raise their children in faith,
and have brought this work through 150 years?*¹⁴

This statement of President Packer's clearly shows that angels attend the Church's rank and file as they raise children in faith, pay tithing, conduct sacred temple work, teach classes, and more.

It is my understanding—based on more than twenty years of research—that opera-

tions and ministrations of angels are largely unknown to mortals. Angels can move about the earth conducting the Lord's divine work, and they serve, minister, and mingle among mortals, usually without our awareness. Most of us in mortality will never see an angel. As Parley P. Pratt instructed, angels can "be present without being visible to mortals."¹⁵ And Paul wrote, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2).

Before I cite Elder Oaks, I want to share a personal item. During the 1990s my parents had a landline telephone that was state of the art, high tech, and ultramodern. It was so technologically advanced that it had an internal memory that would remember up to twenty phone numbers. After my parents entered the phone numbers of friends or family into the phone's memory, all my parents had to do was lift the receiver and push the appropriate button, and the phone would automatically dial any of their children. What an amazing miracle! Dad and Mom could be in contact with any one of their children in seconds.

I will now refer to Elder Dallin H. Oaks' conference talk. Elder Oaks presented specific teachings on how angels may communicate to us who are mortals. His teachings apply to you and to me:

The ministering of angels can also be unseen. Angelic messages can be delivered by a voice or merely by thoughts or feelings communicated to the mind. . . .

*Nephi described three manifestations of the ministering of angels when he reminded his rebellious brothers that (1) they had "seen an angel," (2) they had "heard his voice from time to time," and (3) also that an angel had "spoken unto [them] in a still small voice" though they were "past feeling" and "could not feel his words" (1 Ne. 17:45). . . . Most angelic communications are felt or heard rather than seen.*¹⁶

Compared to the aforementioned telephone, which is now a relic of the past, angelic communications are astounding and remarkable. They are wonderful gifts from a loving Heavenly Father: visitations from beyond the veil—unseen angels communicating to mortals by thoughts or by feelings—are spectacular gifts. As the Book of Mormon teaches, “It is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men” (Moroni 7:37). The telephone, of course, does not work by faith.

My research has uncovered instances in which angels have provided temporal assistance to mortals. An angel, for example, provided food and water to the prophet Elijah when he fled for his life from Jezebel (see 1 Kings 19:1–7). And here is a modern example of an angel providing temporal assistance: Elder Heber C. Kimball related an occasion when he and Brigham Young traveled together, conducting the Lord’s work. They started out with only \$13.50, but along the way they paid for a number of items, including travel, lodging, and meals. In fact, they paid out over \$87.00, although they had only had \$13.50. Elder Kimball stated:

*Brother Brigham often suspected that I put the money in his trunk or clothes, thinking I had . . . money which I had not acquainted him with, but this was not so. The money could only have been put in his trunk by some heavenly messenger who administered to our necessities daily, as he knew we needed.*¹⁷

Angels as Agents of Love

All angels minister with heavenly love, and every angelic communication to the Saints is a message of love. Oliver Cowdery personally witnessed the love of John the Baptist when John appeared to him and Joseph Smith. Sometime after John’s visitation Oliver wrote that this angel’s “love enkindled upon

our souls.”¹⁸ Decades later, in the April 1916 general conference, President Joseph F. Smith spoke of the love of heavenly messengers:

*I believe we move and have our being in the presence of heavenly messengers and of heavenly beings. We are not separate from them. . . . I claim that we live in their presence, they see us, they are solicitous for our welfare, they love us now more than ever. . . . Their love for us and their desire for our well being must be greater than that which we feel for ourselves.*¹⁹

I will now share two stories wherein angels communicated love to mortals. At one point in his life Parley P. Pratt remained captive for months in a Missouri dungeon. He was very discouraged. After fasting and praying for a number of days, Elder Pratt experienced a powerful answer to his prayer. He wrote:

*A personage . . . stood before me with a smile of compassion in every look, and pity mingled with the tenderest love and sympathy in every expression of the countenance. . . . A well known voice saluted me, which I readily recognized as that of the wife of my youth, who had for near two years been sweetly sleeping where . . . the weary are at rest.*²⁰

This personage, as an angelic messenger, delivered her message to Elder Pratt and then departed.

While on the subject of female angels, I will share an important statement by President Brigham Young:

*Suppose that a female angel were to come into your house and you had the privilege of seeing her, how would she be dressed? . . . She would be neat and nice, her countenance full of glory, brilliant, bright, and perfectly beautiful, and in every act her gracefulness would charm the heart of every beholder. There is nothing needless about her.*²¹

The second account of an angel who communicated love comes from President Ezra Taft Benson, who recounted an eternal love story of his wife's parents. His father-in-law, Carl Christian Amussen, a convert from Denmark, was a watchmaker and jeweler in Utah. He passed away in 1902, leaving his wife, Barbara, a widow for forty years. In 1942 the deceased Carl came to his wife to inform her of her approaching death. What a great blessing it was for her to see her eternal companion for the first time in so many years. Carl appeared to Barbara and informed her that she would pass away on the following Thursday. Barbara had no doubt that her husband had appeared to her, nor did she doubt that she only had less than a week to live; in fact, she began to make concrete plans for her death. On Sunday at church she bore her testimony and bid the ward members goodbye. During the coming days she withdrew her savings from the bank, ordered her casket from a local mortuary, paid her bills, and even had the power and water turned off at her home. Then she went to her daughter Mabel's home to await her passing.

President Benson concluded:

On the day of her passing, Mabel came into the room where her mother was reclining on the bed. Her mother said, "Mabel, I feel a little bit drowsy. I feel I will go to sleep. Do not disturb me if I sleep until the eventide."

Those were her last words, and she peacefully passed away.²²

It is my testimony that angels are agents of love, light, and power. The Lord's angels exist because of Jesus Christ and His infinite Atonement. I testify that angels appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith. I also testify that the sacred work of angels continues in our day. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. For those who wish to pursue a study of angels, there are hundreds of passages of scripture that deal with the topic. Additionally, latter-day prophets and apostles have provided hundreds of statements on the subject.

2. Jeffrey R. Holland, "For a Wise Purpose," *Ensign*, January 1996, 17.

3. Bible Dictionary, s.v. "Sabaoth," 764.

4. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 2:996; citing the following passages: 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chronicles 18:18; Psalm 103:21; 148:2.

5. Koehler and Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 2:995.

6. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Edward Robinson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 839; "host (organized body) of angels," which cites 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chronicles 18:18; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 103:21; 148:2; and Joshua 5:14–15, which refers to a "theophanic angel."

7. *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. "host," 841.

8. Harold B. Lee, "Stand Ye in Holy Places," *Ensign*, July 1973, 123.

9. Henry B. Eyring, "O Ye That Embark," *Ensign*, November 2008, 58.

10. Jeffrey R. Holland, *However Long and Hard the Road* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 13–14.

11. HC 2:383.

12. HC 2:386–87.

13. HC 2:381.

14. Boyd K. Packer, *Mine Errand from the Lord: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Boyd K. Packer* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2008), 385.

15. Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, 10th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 113.

16. Dallin H. Oaks, "The Aaronic Priesthood and the Sacrament," *Ensign*, November 1998, 39.

17. Heber C. Kimball, "One York Shilling," in *Best-Loved Stories of the LDS People*, vol. 1, ed. Jack M. Lyon, Linda Ririe Gundry, and Jay A. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 375; from Helen Mar Whitney, "Life Incidents, No. II," *Woman's Exponent* 9, no. 4 (15 July 1880): 26.

18. In B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century One*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City:

Deseret News, 1930), 1:178, note 5; from Oliver Cowdery, First Communication on the Rise of the Church, *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 1 (October 1834): 15.

19. Joseph F. Smith, *CR*, April 1916, 2–3.

20. *PPP*, 1874, 261.

21. *JD*, 16:21. Beyond this explicit quote by Brigham Young, there is other evidence for the existence of female angels.

22. Ezra Taft Benson, *Come unto Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 20–22.