

The Spirits of the air: of Angels & Demons

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1. REALITY

That there are spirits in the air around us is a thought to which -I dare say- we scarcely give much thought. To our modern minds, influenced as we are by the thinking of the twentieth century, spirits can scarcely be real. Yet - as I hope to demonstrate in this article - Scriptures insist that such is the case nevertheless. In this submission on the Spirits of the Air, I wish first of all to trace the thoughts of persons and bodies who (may) have influenced our perception of the spirits of the air. I intend also to point out why we are to understand well what goes on in the invisible world around us. Further, I propose to deal with a.o. angels, demons, and the struggle between the two.

Our fathers of by-gone times had appreciation for the reality of spirits, as is evidenced by the existence of the so-called Engelenbrug (Angel's Bridge) in the Dutch town of Middelburg. The name appears to have come from an episode in the early eighteenth century; B Smijtegelt, a minister of the Reformed churches, had to pass over that bridge to visit a dying congregation member. Because of this preacher's forceful opposition to misuse of alcohol, clients of the local pub hatched a plan to kill the preacher as he crossed the bridge. Yet when the thugs observed Smijtegelt crossing the bridge, he was accompanied by two strong-armed figures - angels who protected him without himself knowing it.

This awareness of angels, however, has dimmed since the days of our fathers. Certainly it appears safe to say that we today do not take seriously the possibility that there are angels - and possibly demons too - around us all the time. Why that is so? That will be due in large part to the fact that we all grew up in an age of science. Characteristic of our century, particularly in the post-war era, was the notion that all things truly real were measurable, tangible. Indeed, acceptable wisdom dictated that anything not measurable or tangible was not truly real. This lesson was hammered into our young minds: reality is what you see, what you sense, what you can observe and study.

Within such a climate of thought, there is, we understand, no room for spirits in the air. Elves, angels, ghosts, and demons: these are not measurable, are not tangible, and so - we are given to understand by the age in which we live - these spirit-like beings must be discarded as mythological left-overs of the unenlightened times of the distant past.

This influence of a scientific world view was not restricted only to those moments when we read material directed to us by the world. Church leaders too - being as they were children of their times also - did not adequately appreciate the reality of spirits in the air. Notably important here is H Bavinck, that giant of reformed continental dogmatics at the turn of our century. This influential thinker in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands was actually at a loss as to what to make of the doctrine of angels. His conviction was that angels had no real place in the religious life of any Christian today; the importance of angels is rather to be found - thought he - in that they were used by God to bring His Word to various individuals in Bible times (cf *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* II, 473). Similarly Bavinck did not see a place for demons in the lives of God's people today (cf III, 144ff)

This lack of appreciation for the spirits of the air appears to have dominated the thinking of the average believer in the course of our century. Not that every theologian agreed. Abraham Kuyper lamented the fact that angels were not seriously reckoned with in the daily life of the average church member of his day (Engelen, pg 9). K Schilder (cf *Wat is de Hemel and Wat is de Hel*; also *Tusschen 'Ja' en 'Nee'*, 3ff) and GC Berkouwer (cf *The Providence of God and Sin*, 99ff) took seriously the presence of angels and

demons in this world (though Berkouwer, in his latest dogmatic treatise on *The Return of Christ* no longer has any room for angels). Yet even the works of these leaders in the reformed world did not result in the average reformed church member taking angels and demons for real in their daily lives. Indeed, even up till today, Reformed Christians in the Western world do not take seriously the thought that there may well be spirits around them at any and every moment; we have not learned to appreciate that angels and demons are very much part of every day life.

I consider this a dangerous development. Already the world around us has written off angels and demons as a myth we've inherited from the less enlightened fathers. If the Scriptural revelation of angels and demons does not come alive for us as something real for our daily lives, it may well be that we see the day when our children consider the matter of spirits to be theological baggage we can well do without. It is in this regard worthwhile to note that there are today theologians (calling themselves reformed) who consider the whole subject of angels to be unprofitable for any believer unless one somehow first experiences angels (H Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, 1979, 175f.). This same writer sees no need to make mention of demons at all. There is then need for us to take the matter of angels and demons most seriously.

This is the more so because of trends in the world around us in the last decade. Whether it be out of reaction to the rigidity of a strictly scientific world view, or due to the import of Eastern and pagan religions into the western world, or to have some combination of these (and other) factors, the last years have seen a renewed interest in the world of spirits. Occult, witchcraft, channeling: it's all found a recognized place in the New Age Movement. This renewed interest in our day in things spiritual prompts the need for a proper reformed understanding of what the spirits are all about. We may be certain that we'll hear more about the subject in the years to come. Indeed, we can count on it that our youth will come into contact with the world of the spirits, will even play games with that world as certainly as they will experiment with drugs.

A third reason why we do well to be keenly interested in the spirits of the air is because of what the Lord our God, in His infinite wisdom, has been pleased to tell us about the spirits of the air. Of particular importance here is the closing part of the Letter to the Ephesians. It is no accident that in this chapter the apostle Paul lays beside each other the subject of interpersonal relations in the Christian household (5:21-6:9) and the Christian's warfare with the hosts of darkness (6:10-20). In fact, the word translated by "finally" in 6:10 is not at all meant to divorce 5:21-6:9 from 6:10-20; that word is rather meant to tie the two paragraphs together (cf Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 161). What the apostle does in 6:10ff is explain the deeper reality behind the struggles that one experiences in the Christian home between wives and husbands, children and parents, and (in the days of Paul) slaves and masters. It is the apostle's contention in Ephesians 6 that the frictions and tensions that be are rooted in that deeper reality of spiritual war. The devil, together with his demons (those spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places), battle against the saints of God in an effort to break apart their lives. Those tensions in the home are part of that battle.

Here, then, is evidence aplenty that the subject of angels and demons is most relevant for the ups and downs of the lives we live day by day.

2. ANGELS

The Lord leaves no doubt in His Word that there definitely are spirits in the air around us. We now line up the biblical data on the obedient angels.

We're told in Gen 1:1 that "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The following verses of that first chapter of the Bible tell us how the Lord formed and fashioned the earth and what dwells on this planet. What we are not told, however, is how the Lord formed the heavens and whatever might exist there. So it is that we know nothing about the creation of angels. We're not told it because our existence is of this earth; we need not know it in order to praise our Maker.

That does not mean that we know nothing about the beginnings of the angels. For to Job God says that the

angels were already there when God "laid the foundations of the earth", more, ever since the beginning the angels have been singing and shouting for joy because of the wonders of Gods creation (cf Job 38:4ff) It would appear than that we are to understand that the angels have existed from the time of Gen 1:1.

Why was it that the Lord God was pleased to fashion angels? The Lord tells us that the reason for their existence is that these creatures might praise and glorify the Creator. Such is the united testimony of Holy Writ; all creation (and therefore angels included) exists for the purpose of glorifying God (cf Is 43:7). Nehemiah puts it into words:

"Thou art the Lord, Thou alone; Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host...; and the host of heaven worships Thee" (9:6).

Accordingly, we confess the following in Art 12 of the Belgic Confession:

"We believe that the Father...has created out of nothing heaven and earth and all creatures...to serve [the] Creator."

That angels indeed were created for the glory of God is pointed up in that we read of angels doing precisely this. Recall again the words God spoke to Job concerning the time when He laid the foundations of the earth. Said God: at that time "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7). It's that purpose for existence that prompts the psalmist to encourage the heavens to praise the Lord. Ps 148: "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord for the heavens.... Praise Him, all His angels, praise Him, all His host!" (vss 1f). And again: "Bless the Lord, O you His angels" (Ps 103:20). Yet that praise was not to come for no reason; the praise the psalmist encourages from the angels is a praise responding to God's mighty deeds. The poet of Ps 103 instructs the angels to bless the Lord - why? - because "the Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all" (vs 19). The angels over the fields of Bethlehem sang God's praise because God acted; He sent His Son to earth (Luke 2). In the Revelation shown to John, the angels praise God because of the saving work of the Lamb (5:11ff) or because of God's just judgments upon the sins of earth (19:1ff). So it is that these heavenly beings do not attract attention for themselves, nor do they desire praise for themselves (Rev 19:10); they instead ever and again direct attention to God.

In light of the task for which they were created, God has given to angels their specific "being, shape, and form" (Art 12, Belgic Confession). To carry out their task, God did not give to angels bodies of flesh and blood; God made them instead as "spirits" (cf Heb 1:14). These heavenly spirits have knowledge of God and can think (cf 1 Pet 1:12; Ephesians 3:10). It is this knowledge of God and their ability to think that the angels use to respond to God's actions with songs and words of praise (cf Job 38:7; Luke 2:13f; 1 Cor 13:1; Rev 5:11ff). Angels were initially created in great numbers (Ps 148:2) and that number has not grown since through procreation (Mt 22:30). As such, angels know no family allegiances; they can concentrate with undivided attention on the tasks for which they exist (cf 1 Cor 7:32ff). There appear to be various classes of angels; beside "regular" angels, Scriptures speak of cherubs (Gen 3:24; 1 Kings 6:24; Ezek 10:3) and serafs (Is 6:2), as well as of archangels (Jude 9).

The angels God created for His own glory were objects of His election (1 Tim 5:21). From eternity God had determined which of these innumerable angels would remain faithful to Him, and which would not. In accordance with this divine election, a certain number of angels - no more and no less than God had determined - rebelled against God shortly after God finished creating the world. Once the angels had chosen whether they would remain faithful to God or would join in the rebellion, it was no longer possible for the angels, be they fallen or not, to shift allegiance anymore. As a result, those angels who remained faithful to God are now committed to God with absolute allegiance. It is that absolute allegiance to God that gives rise to their exemplary obedience to God. The faithful angels are characterized in Scripture as "hearkening to the voice of His will" and "ministers that do His will" (Ps 103:20f). There is no hesitation on the part of angels, no reluctance to obey no desire to disobey. It is for that reason that Jesus Christ was able, in the third petition of the Lord's Prayer, to hold up the angels as an example for the kind of obedience He desires from His people. To quote the Catechism: Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven is a prayer in which we ask God that "everyone may carry out the duties of his office and

calling as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven" (LD 49).

These creatures of heaven created for the praise of God in the heavenly places are commonly known as "angels". The word "angel" describes the task of these heavenly creatures in so far as it relates to man. For the word used in Hebrew for "angel" means "messenger". So Jacob, for example, when he traveled back to Canaan from Padam-Aram, sent angels, messengers, to greet Esau (Gen 32:3). Similarly King David and his military commander Joab sent angels, messengers, back and forth to each other with instructions and reports about the war (II Sam 11). Those creatures who inhabit the heavens are God's angels, God's messengers who carry messages from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven. Jacob's dream about the ladder is a case in point (Gen 28:10ff). It is in that same light that we are to see the various angels God sent to specific persons with messages from God. We may think of Abram and Lot (Gen 18f), of Gideon (Judges 6), of Manoah and his wife (Judges 13), of Zechariah (Luke 1), of Mary (Luke 1), of John (Rev 19:9). Similarly, it is that task of being God's messengers that is pointed up in the angelic meeting around God's throne described in Job 1 (cf Zech 1:11).

This task of being messengers between heaven and earth, however, implies more than that angels say things on God's behalf to individuals on earth or report to God on how persons on earth are faring. It is as messengers of God that angels are also instructed by God to do certain things on earth, and by doing certain things to communicate a message from God to those who live on earth. It is this thought that is captured in the words of Hebrews 1:14. In that text it is said of angels that they are "ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation". Sent forth from God these angels are, in order to do specific things for the benefit of the elect. Here we may think of the words of Ps 91:

"He will give His angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone" (vss 11f).

We may likewise think of what Elisha's servant was allowed to see when he and the prophet were surrounded by the Syrian army: "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" (II Kings 6:17). Messengers of God these horses and chariots of fire were, messengers sent by God to protect His prophet, messengers sent by God to impress on the young servant that God ever and again protects His people (cf Ps 34:7). Not - let it be said - that each Christian has his own individual "guardian angel" to protect him. This element of Roman Catholic theology has been rejected by the Reformers as Scripturally unsound. It rather is so that angels in general guard God's people at any given moment.

Yet it is not only by means of protection that angels serve the saints. God involved an angel to punish Israel after David numbered the people (II Sam 24:16f). That angel was used by God to impress upon David and all Israel the saving message that God's people were bound to trust upon God alone. Similarly, God sent an angel to kill 185,000 of the Assyrian soldiers who had besieged Jerusalem (II Kings 19:35), and in so doing reminded His people of that same truth. And in the Revelation shown to John, the Lord Jesus makes clear that angels pour out God's plagues upon an apostate mankind (cf Rev 16). In all these cases God uses the angels to communicate a truth to His people on earth.

The function of angels has been profoundly affected by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Calvary. The purpose of that sacrifice - as we well know - was to ransom a people from the power of the devil and reconcile these to God. As such, the purpose of Calvary revolved around the glory of God on high.

The effects of that triumph did not touch earth alone. Because of that victory, the angels received new perspective for their work too. Christ's triumph made repentance on earth possible, and this repentance on earth prompts great joy in heaven among the angels (Luke 15:10). Indeed, it is that triumph of the Son of God on Calvary that allows God in heaven to send His angels to earth to serve "those who are to obtain salvation" (Heb 1:14). From all eternity glory rightfully belonged to God, and because of Calvary could glory again be given to God; today the angels are engrossed in that one task of bringing that to God on high, and they do it both by word and song, as well as by serving those for whom Christ shed his blood.

Are there angels around us today? Do the angels today serve Gods elect, guard us on our way lest we dash

our foot against a stone? The answer here is yes, they do. Though we live in the twentieth century, there are always angels guarding us, serving us. These angels, we are to know are sent from heaven for our good by none else than our Father in Jesus Christ. Why we can be sure of it? Because that's what Hebrews 1 says: angels are ministering spirits sent forth to serve those who are to obtain salvation. By the grace of God in Christ, we are to obtain salvation. To ensure that we be not harmed, that we can instead give glory to our Creator/Redeemer, the Lord sends His angels to us day by day to have charge of us. What is said in Scripture about angels is not a truth that was valid only in the days of David or of Paul. Today - though we may not see them, let alone recognise them as angels - they always accompany us and our children, lest we should dash our foot against a stone. More, by means of angels the Lord our God guards us so that we are able to serve our Creator day by day.

3. DEMONS

Demons were not originally created as demons. The Lord God, Scripture tells us, had created all things good, very good (Gen 1:31), including the angels. But, Scriptures add, certain "angels...did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling" (Jude 6; cf II Peter 2:4). The reference is to a revolt that occurred in heaven sometime shortly after God created heaven and earth. For reasons not told us in Scriptures, some angels opted to rebel against God and leave their first position. It should be noted that this angelic rebellion and fall did not happen without the will of God, for all things in heaven and on earth always were and always shall be totally in the hands of the Almighty Creator. The apostle Paul even speaks specifically "of elect angels" (I Tim 5:21), thereby implying that certain angels were set aside for "reprobation" before the foundation of the world.

These fallen angels - commonly called demons or devils - remain angels in that they retain the outward characteristics of these spirits. As faithful angels, so also these fallen angels are body-less creatures, have no family, have knowledge, can communicate. They are different from the faithful angels, however, in that they have become totally depraved, and so intent on every evil; they cannot do good. Their leader is that angel known as the Devil and Satan (cf Mt 25:41).

Before we go further into the characteristics and attitudes of these fallen demons, we do well to have straight in our minds the fact that the leader of these demons is as much a creature as anything else God created. Contrary to what has been suggested in the course of history (and is held for truth in too many minds today) is the fact that Satan is not some sort of a second god, an anti-god, a god of darkness who opposes the God of light (cf Art 12, Belgic Con). It is true that the Evil One would love to be worshipped as a god (as indeed he is by people of this world, (cf II Cor 4:4), but he in fact **is not** a god. To suggest that in some way he is a god able to do this or that of himself - even read human minds - gives too much honour to Satan, and as such takes honour away from the true God. The consequence of that observation is that this world is not to be understood as a battle ground between two opposing deities, two powerful gods having it out (with those on earth being the hapless victims of their struggle). The Almighty reveals in His Word to men that Satan is very much a creature, and as such is limited, is finite. He is not everywhere present, is not all-powerful, does not know all things. Nor can he continue to exist by himself; he too, as any creature, is dependent on his Creator for day by day existence. What the Church confesses in LD 9 of the Heidelberg Catechism applies to the Evil One and his demons too: "the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who out of nothing created heaven and earth and all that is in them,... still upholds and governs them by His eternal counsel and providence" (cf Art 13, Belgic Confession). Satan, too, lives on because Almighty God allows it, grants him continued existence. Recollection of this reality will go a long way in having a proper perspective of the demons and their prince.

For the benefit of His children, it pleased the Lord to reveal a number of characteristics and attitudes of the demons and their prince. It is particularly through the names given to the prince of demons that the Lord reveals to us the character of these fallen angels. The names God reveals included, a.o., Satan, Devil, Belial, Beelzebul (or Beelzebub), Dragon, Serpent, etc. To gain some understanding of this prince of demons, I draw attention specifically to the first two names mentioned: Satan and Devil.

The DEVIL he is called in Scripture. That term Devil comes from a Greek word that means to throw things through each other. The result of throwing things through each other, we know, is that one makes a

chaotic mess. It can be done not only by deeds but also by words; by distorting, by tearing comments out of contexts, and so on, people can be set against people, a chaos made. So that word "devil" comes to mean slanderer, false accuser.

The Lord would have us to know that this name characterises the Evil One and his demons. These fallen angels are bent on establishing chaos, on driving God and people apart, on driving people from people. To reach that goal, the demons slander, make false accusations, twist both the truth of God's Word and the words people speak, the deeds people perform. As such, Jesus makes of calling the Devil a "murderer" and a "liar" (cf John 8:44).

How much of a devil the Devil and his angels are is illustrated countless times on the pages of Holy Writ. We may think, for example, of the Devil's efforts in Paradise to deceive the woman. Purposefully, consciously, the Devil twisted God's words so that God was made to look stingy - He hadn't given all the trees to Adam and Eve for food (Gen 3). Let no one think either that the Evil One has changed his tactics since the days of the fall; that creature is absolutely depraved and cannot change himself in essence. He may put himself out as "an angel of light" (II Cor 11:14), but all the while remains a deadly Devil.

The Lord also reveals the leader of the fallen angels as "SATAN". That word simply means adversary, enemy, opponent. The reference is to someone who puts obstacles on the path of another, who goes out of his way to trip another up (cf II Sam 19:22). So we read in I Chron 21 that "Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel" (vs 1). That verse captures the meaning of the term "satan"; the Evil One is **against**, is contrary, opposes (cf Zech 3:1ff).

Who specifically does the Evil One oppose? That, we understand, is God. It was against God that he rebelled in the beginning, against God that he incited Eve in Paradise. Because it is God against whom Satan pits himself does he also fight against anyone who loves God and belongs to God. As such, the Evil One sets himself up against the church of God. The church, the people of God who live for God's glory: they are the ones whom Satan hates, the ones he opposes. It is, in other words, against the believers today that Satan fights; these are they whom he tries so hard to trip up.

Why the Lord our God has revealed these names to us? God knows the Evil One, knows how Satan opposes God, opposes God's people, how the Devil slanders God and God's own in an effort to drive people from God. God considers it necessary, for the sake of our own salvation, that we too know just who the Evil One and his demons are. God would not have us consider the Evil One to be some gentle old fool who wouldn't touch us, or some distant force that doesn't affect us. The Devil would have us think it, to be sure, so that we might be easy prey for him. But with these names God reveals to us the character and attitude of the demons and their prince, so that we in turn might take the devil and his angels seriously.

That we are indeed to take Satan and his demons seriously is further pointed up by other titles God is pleased to give to Satan. Jesus Christ calls Satan "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). The apostle Paul is inspired to write that Satan is "the god of this world" (II Cor 4:4). In Ephesians 6 that same apostle uses such threatening terms as "principalities", "powers", "the world rulers of this present darkness" (vs 12) in order to make clear that Satan and his demons have great power. It is as if the apostle would press upon the church of all ages the truth that the Evil One is no harmless wimp, no powerless sulk; it is rather so that he has great power, can issue commands and receives obedience.

Jesus makes mention again of this lofty position and great power in the Revelation He showed to John on Patmos. John is made to see that beast with ten horns and seven heads, that beast to whom the dragon (ie, Satan) "gave his power and his throne and great authority" (Rev 13:2). The intent of the beast is to organise the world powers behind him, to enlist in his service also the false prophet (ie, the apostate preachers of the gospel), and so to unite mankind behind that one god of this world, that dragon, that Evil One. In his efforts to realise his goal, in his efforts to gather all mankind behind him, to glean worship from the whole earth, this Evil One and his beast leave no stone unturned: temptation, deception, force, slander, malicious accusations, lies, murders - all of it is used by this Devil, by this Satan, to attain that goal. It means for us that the warning of that voice from heaven is to be taken seriously: "woe to you, O

earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath" (Rev 12:12). So too are the words of Peter to be carefully heeded: "Be sober, watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour" (I Pet 5:8). In fact, this is the reason why Paul says what he says in Ephesians 6: "Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (vs 11). Well does the church echo in her confession this truth of Scripture: "the devils and evil spirits are so depraved that they are enemies of God and of all that is good. With all their might, they lie in wait like murderers to ruin the Church and all its members and to destroy everything by their wicked devices" (Art 12, Belgic Confession). And elsewhere: "our sworn enemies – [including the devil] - do not cease to attack us" (LD 52).

To sharpen our focus the more on this dark reality we are to note that there are innumerable demons (cf Mark 5:9; Ephesians 6:12). More, these demons are presented not as operating simply in far away places; these demons are presented as being active in the air (Ephesians 2:2; 6:12). They, like angels, are spirits, are as such invisible, can be anywhere. That in turn means that demons can certainly be present with us as we read this article, can be present with us as we weld or do our baking. Not, let me add, that demons are necessarily always present wherever God's people are; angels are with God's people all the time to protect them, demons **can** be present.

This horrid reality can in itself be enough to frighten us much. Who, after all, would dare to be comfortable with the thought of various demons in our midst?! It is small wonder indeed that unbelievers would prefer to ignore the reality of demons.

Yet it is not the Lord's intent to frighten us. For in His Word He has told us much more than that these depraved enemies of God and of all that is good lie in wait like murderers to ruin the Church and all its members. God would have us know that the Evil One and his hosts are defeated.

I mentioned earlier the text that relates that certain angels in the beginning left their proper dwelling (Jude 6). This same text tells us also of God's immediate response to the fall of these angels. Says Jude: these fallen angels "have been kept by [God] in eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgment of the great day. With those words the Lord tells His church that the Evil One and his demons did not, on the day of their revolt, break free from God's sovereign control; rather God straightaway bound these disobedient angels so that they were restricted in their activities. Jude speaks of chains being used to bind these demons, and the reference to chains makes clear that God permits these demons to do certain things and no more, to go so far and no further. So it is that neither the Evil One himself, nor his demons, can do a thing without God permitting it. What we read in Job about God allowing Satan to do this and that to Job is characteristic of all Satan's activities (Job 1,2); always must Satan acknowledge that there is One stronger than He, One who limits Satan's activities. From that it follows too that even something like the temptation in Paradise did not happen without God; God permitted the Devil to make use of the serpent, permitted the Devil to utter his deception to the woman. Here is touched that deep and most comforting truth confessed in Art 13 of the Belgic Confession: God "so rules and governs [all things] that in this world **nothing** happens without His direction." And later: "His power and goodness are so great and beyond understanding that He ordains and executes His work in the most excellent and just manner, even when devils...act unjustly." Again: "He holds in check the devil and all our enemies so that they cannot hurt us without His permission and will."

Bound Satan is so that he can do no more that God allows. This binding is something the Evil One and his demons do not wish to acknowledge. In fact, ever since the day of his initial rebellion the Evil One has continued the struggle to free himself from the chains imposed on him by his Maker. Yet always in the course of the OT was Satan but a tool of God (cf II Sam 24:1 with I Chron 21:1).

There came the day when Jesus engaged the Devil and his demons on Calvary, On that day, Satan tried once more so desperately to break the eternal chains by which the devils were bound. But break those chains the demons could not, and they could not break the Christ of God either. For that three-hour hellish darkness around the cross was broken by that piercing cry of triumph: "It is finished" (John 19:30). With that triumph over the Evil One Christ "disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them" (Col 2:15). So it was that when Christ could ascend into heaven, He could lead a host of captives

(Ephesians 4:8); more, in heaven Christ could be crowned Lord of all (cf Acts 2:36; Col 2:10; Ephesians 1:21f). As the Lord's Prayer also says it: "for Thine -and not Satan's- is the kingdom and the power. LD 52: Christ has "power over all things." It is this same reality that John was allowed to see in Revelation 20; an angel came down from heaven and "seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him" for the entire NT dispensation (vs 1f).

It is true that the Lord would have His church know well who Satan is so as to be adequately armed against the "wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11); God, after all, made the human race responsible. At the same time, though, the Lord of the church does not wish His people to live in fear of an undefeated enemy. Satan is bound, is dependent on God for existence, **must** do what the Lord would have him do. In fact, this fallen angel with his cronies must fulfil the purpose for which they were initially created; the Devil and his demons must add to the glory of God in heaven.

4. THE BATTLE OF THE SPIRITS

After the fall into sin in Paradise, it pleased the Lord God to establish enmity between the seed of the serpent and the Seed of the woman (Gen 3:15). This struggle we understand to be between Satan and Christ, and so also between Satan's followers and Christ's followers.

In that struggle against Christ and His Church, the Evil One employs people. Recall King Saul who, because of the evil spirit within him, tried to kill David (I Sam 18:10f; 19:8ff. Satan's use of people in the struggle against Christ and His Church became evident particularly in the time of the Saviour's earthly sojourn; as the Son of God appeared in the flesh, so also Satan - copy-cat that he is (as Luther aptly termed him) - also appeared in the flesh in the form of demons possessing persons. Satan's intent with this demon possession was to frustrate the saving work of Jesus Christ (cf Mark 1:24, 34; 5:7ff; 9:14ff etc). Of special significance in this matter of Satan using people to fight against the Christ is that which is recorded of Judas Iscariot; of him it is written that "Satan entered into him" (John 13:27; cf vs 2).

Yet it is not just individuals whom the Evil One uses in his struggle against God. Daniel is given the information that there is "a prince of the kingdom of Persia" as well as a "prince of Greece" (Daniel 10:13,20). More, the prince of Persia was able to prevent the messenger sent to Daniel from coming to him for 21 days; indeed, the messenger could not get around the prince of Persia until help came from no one less than the angel Michael (10:13). These data point up that Satan, together with his demons, is able to influence even nations and governments in the struggle against the church. Such is also what is revealed in Revelation 13 in the vision of the beast to whom Satan gave his power and his throne and great authority. That beast was given authority over "every tribe and people and tongue and nation," was allowed too "to make war on the saints and to conquer them" (vs 7). The point of it all is that in the struggle between Satan and Christ, the Evil One and his demons use peoples and governments. Behind the attacks made by individuals and institutions on the Church and her members stands Satan and his demons. Paul captures that same reality when he speaks about the "wiles of the devil"; after having spoken about the struggles of the Christian household the apostle sees fit to remind his readers that "we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:11). It is this reality that the Church confesses in LD 48 of the Heidelberg Catechism when prayer is brought to God to "destroy the works of the devil, every power that raises itself against Thee, and every conspiracy against Thy holy Word."

The Devil and his demons attack the church of Jesus Christ. We understand that this attack against the church is at the same time an attack against the individual members of the church (irrespective of age). It is that reality that prompts the command of Scripture to fight against the Evil One. I think again of Paul's charge in Ephesians 6: "put on the armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (vs 11).

And again: "take the whole armour of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day" (vs 13). It is the reality of that dark battle directed against ourselves that dictates the need for knowing the Bible, studying it. It's that same reality that makes alertness and soberness so necessary: how is Satan attacking

us now? It's these attacks of this sworn enemy that prompts to prayer: "Father, Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One" (cf Ephesians 6:14ff)

Yet it is not so that God's people stand alone in this battle against the Evil One and his demons. The battle, we know, is ultimately against God and His Christ. Through Jesus Christ, the Lord fights back against Satan and his demons, fights back using various means. As to the means God uses, one may think of the preaching of the gospel and the service of officebearers, one may think too of the labours of the Holy Spirit. Yet in light of the subject at hand, it is specifically the angels that we are not to forget. Well do Scriptures call God "the Lord of hosts" (cf Zech 1), and the point of that title is that the Lord has at His disposal an army of heavenly warriors ready to do His bidding. So it was that Jacob on his way back from Padam Aram to Canaan was met by the angels of God, to which Jacob's response was, "this is God's army" (Gen 32:1f). The point of that revelation was that Jacob should not fear the armies of Esau; God had sent His angels to fight for Jacob. Similarly, Elisha was surrounded by angels when the king of Syria sent out his army to capture the prophet; these angels were sent by God to defend His servant (II Kings 6:17). Daniel was told not only of the princes of Persia and Greece (puppets of Satan), but also the angel Michael, the prince of Israel. The point of that revelation was that Daniel - and Israel with him - should know that men do not fight fallen angels all alone; God sends His holy angels to fight along side of His people, more, God's angels prevent Satan and his legions from succeeding (Dan 10:13,21; 12:1).

The Lord would have us know too that angels are very much active in the New Testament dispensation. At the Ascension of Christ it was Michael and his angels who fought against Satan and his demons, and ultimately cast these devilish hosts out of heaven (Rev 12:7:3). In Satan's effort to rid the early church of its leaders, it was an angel who frustrated Satan's efforts; while the guards slept Peter was freed from prison (Acts 12:6ff).

No, it is not so that we daily see angels around us, protecting us from devilish attacks, fighting off the demons of hell lest they harm us. What we see, however, does not determine the totality of reality; faith concerns itself with that which one does not see (Heb 11:1). We are to remember that Elisha's servant did not see the angelic host surrounding the prophet until the Lord was pleased to open his eyes to see the facts as they really were (II Kings 6:17). Despite the passage of many centuries, God continues to use angels to protect His children from attacks of the Evil One (cf Ps 91:11).

It is this faith that our fathers of by-gone ages believed. That faith has found expression in the Confessions of the church, confessions which we consider to be fully Scriptural. Angels, demons, the battle of the spirits: time and again the Confessions of the church echo what the God of the Church has revealed about these matters in His holy Word (see previous articles in this series for references). So it is for God's people today to accept the reality (of angels and demons, to recall that reality) in the struggles of this life. It means that we are to realise that behind the attacks we perceive - be it attacks propagated by governments or by persons of influence, by lies or by slander, by peer pressure or mockery, by drugs or drink or sex or music - behind these various attacks is that struggle we do not see; Satan and his angels use any and every method hell can dream up to attack the church, to undermine the preaching of the gospel to frustrate the raising of the children of the covenant. In the disputes we face in the home, it is more than disobedience in our children we meet, more than character clashes and independent streaks; in these frictions we face the devil and his efforts to tear ourselves and our children away from God. It is understanding that reality that drives us to God in prayer, petitioning Him to destroy every effort Satan might make to break down our families and the Church of God. For against Satan and his legion of demons we are not able to stand by ourselves.

In that battle we do not see, the Lord God has given to all of His children great responsibility. Scriptures are full of imperatives directing Gods people to be ever alert against the subtle attacks of a devious Devil or the roaring charges of a frustrated Satan (cf Ephesians 6:11; I Pet 5:8; Rev 12:12). Yet beside the responsibility we on earth have in this struggle, God would have us remember the heavenly dimension involved in this struggle. Because God is sovereign can neither the Evil One nor any of his demons so much as move unless the Lord permits. As such, from God's "point of view" one cannot speak properly of a battle; one speaks rather of God using Satan for His divine purposes.

This truth is illustrated for us in the words of the prophet Micaiah. Said this OT prophet to king Ahab:

I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside Him on His right hand and on His left; and the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, 'I will entice him.' And the Lord said to him, 'By what means' And he said, I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And He said, 'You are to entice him, and you will succeed; go forth and do so" (I Kings 22:19ff).

The point of this peak-behind-the-scenes is that even evil spirits are used by the Lord for His sovereign purposes. It is Gods wish to destroy the man who officially introduced Baal worship in Israel; to do that the Lord makes use of demons.

This same truth is repeated in the NT when the apostle Paul writes that "the coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception" (II Thes 2:8ff). Yet these pretended signs and wonders, this wicked deception, will not come apart from God. Says the apostle: "God sends upon [those who are perishing] a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false" (vs 11). The Evil One is but an instrument in His sovereign hands, an instrument used for His own holy purposes. One may consider again the fact that "Satan entered into" Judas Iscariot (John 13:27) and prompted him to betray his Master to the chief priests and the officers. Yet, say Scriptures, both this betrayal and Christ's resulting crucifixion took place "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23; 64:28). We may note also that it is said of the beast of Rev 13 that he is "allowed" to carry out various terrors in the spiritual battle (vss 14f). All these texts, and many more, point up the truth that, from God's perspective, Satan is very much defeated; he is but an instrument used by God to bring glory to His own great Name. This is a reality most comforting for the saints as they face the daily attacks of the Evil One. It is a comfort because the child of God may believe that every attack from the Evil One and his demons is permitted by God, permitted by our Father in Christ for His glory and our good.

Admittedly, on this last point so many questions remain in our minds. Why does God continue to uphold the demons? Would it not be easier for God's people if He were forthwith to destroy Satan totally? Further, if demons are so bound that they can do nothing without God's will and permission, is God not somehow responsible for the evil they perform?

But here we are to remember what we may confess: "with the greatest humility and reverence we adore the just judgments of God, which are hidden from us, and we content ourselves that we are pupils of Christ, who have only to learn those things which He teaches us in His Word, without transgressing these limits" (Belgic Confession, Art 13). And this we know from God's holy Word: all things, demons and their murderous wiles included, must add to the greater glory of the God of heaven and earth. Indeed, the rebel of the beginning must contribute to the glory of his eternal Creator.
