

ANGEL OF THE COVENANT

A SERMON –Preached on Sunday Morning November 3rd 1867, by

MR. JAMES WELLS

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET

VOL. IX. - No. 469.

"Curse ye Meroz, saith the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants there of; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."—Judges v. 23.

THE Lord Jesus Christ is here, as in some other places, called an angel (the word angel means a messenger or bringer of tidings), because he is the messenger of the everlasting covenant, and because it is by the truths of the gospel that the Lord unites all that shall be saved unto himself. And therefore they needed a messenger that should bring the message effectually, and none but the Lord Jesus Christ could do this. He brought it effectually by his mediatorial work, and that mediatorial work entitles him to the power as Mediator which he now exercises—having power over all flesh, to give eternal life unto as many as the Father hath given to him. And if you trace it out, you will see how suited this is. brings with it the things it speaks of. Hence if it be a word of love, that word brings the love, and it endears the Lord, and unites us to him in his love—that love that is manifest in Christ. And if it be a word of eternal choice, that word brings the grace of the choice even into our souls, gives us an understanding of the choice; and when hope reigneth that we are a part of the happy number so chosen, then we can rejoice that our names are written in heaven. And if it be a word, which it is, of eternal life, by the Savior having swallowed up death, then that word brings the life. "Thy word hath quickened me." "Born again of an incorruptible seed, by the word of God, that liveth and abideth forever," and unites us to God in this new covenant life. Remember that the life which God lives with his people does not mean the life merely of his abstract existence as God; it means another form of life. The Lord says, "Before me there was no God formed,"—no covenant formed. The life that he lives is a new covenant life; he has entered into the new covenant, and he lives in the life of this everlasting covenant. In other words, he has brought his own abstract existence, his own very being, into this everlasting covenant. This is the life he lives; and the word coming, and instructing us, and showing us this covenant, brings us into the same life. Again, if it be a word of sanctification, why, the word brings the thing of which it speaks. "Now ye are clean through the word I have spoken unto you." And if it be a word of pardon, the word brings the thing of which it speaks. "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee." "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven her." "I, even I, am he that blot out thy transgressions, and will not remember thy sins. Why, the word, as accompanied by the Spirit, by the Savior by the presence of God, brings the thing of which it speaks. And if it be a word of glorification, it in part now brings the thing of which it speaks. Are there not times in which the glories of Christ, the glories of God in covenant, as it were, strike our eyes, melt our hearts, expand our souls, and enable us to set our seal to the truth of the words of the poet, that —

"The hill of Zion yields

A thousand sacred sweets
Before we reach the heavenly fields,
Or walk in the golden streets”

There is a secret in the word of God that none but those that are born of God can enter into. None but those that know something of the bitterness of the curse, none but those that know something of the bitterness of their state by nature, can say with David concerning the word of the Lord, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and they were sweet unto my taste; sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.” May it be our happy lot, then, to know that we have not followed any cunningly devised fable, but that our religion lies in the coming of Jesus Christ with power into our souls. Says the apostle, “I will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.”

Our text, you will perceive, is a very solemn one, and it presents itself in a threefold form. Here is, first, the angel of the Lord. Secondly, the anathema — “curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof.” Thirdly, the reason — “because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.” But the first part will occupy nearly all our time this morning.

First, then, a word upon the angel of the Lord. And I shall show you as I go along, beyond dispute, leaving not the least possibility of doubt upon your minds, that this angel is a divine angel, that this angel is one we shall see when we come to that part. But as the word “angel” is a relative term, and relates to the Savior in matters that pertain to our present standing and to our eternal destiny, I will trace out some of the relations which he bears under this name of an angel. You see in what form Jacob recognized this messenger of the covenant. He says, “The Angel which redeemed me from all evil.” Now compare that with what John says concerning the redemption of Christ, or — which in substance is the same thing — concerning the atoning blood of Christ. Jacob says “The Angel which redeemed me from all evil,” and John says “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” While then Jacob lived so many hundreds of years before John, yet see how nicely they agree. “The Angel which redeemed me from all evil” Jacob looked forward in the light of the revelation that God granted unto him and saw the redemption that Jesus Christ should achieve—that his life should be the price that should redeem him, should deliver him from all evil. Ah, then, sin, that is the first evil —delivered him from all that. Death in itself is an evil — delivered him from all evil. Hell is an evil —delivered him from that. And the wrath of God in itself is indeed an evil — although it is just, it is nevertheless an awful thing. But Jesus hath delivered us from the wrath to come. And then Jacob also saw or looked at tribulation too. Ah, he says, that delivered me from all adversity, “redeemed me from all evil.” What a blessed thought it is that you have not one trouble that can last very long! And yet you have not one mercy — I mean of a spiritual kind - that will not last forever. You have not one adversary that will not soon droop and die, but your Friend of friends continues to live, and has made this precious declaration to those who have made him their hope, - “Because I live” — not because there is something good about you — but “Because I live, ye shall live also.” Here, then, see this redeeming angel — “redeem me from all evil.” What say thou? Can we say that we so see ourselves lost that unless the redemption of Christ redeems from all evil, that unless His precious blood cleanseth from all sin, if one sin or one fault were left to us, or one duty for us to perform as a condition of our salvation, there would be no hope? Here, then, Jacob, recognized the kind of redemption that this messenger of the everlasting covenant should bring. Let us take another view of the same thing in the 63rd of Isaiah. He is there set forth in his typical doings, which we can easily understand if we read it, as we shall have to do another scripture presently, in the light of Calvary’s cross. “In all their afflictions he was afflicted” —take it from the literal to the spiritual, — “and the angel of his presence saved them.” Here Jesus Christ is called the angel of God’s presence. And know ye not, brethren, why he is called the angel of God's presence? I will tell you —not to instruct you, because you know already, but, just to remind you. One of the reasons

why he is called the angel of God's presence is because he could go into the presence of God in a way that no mere created angel, and in a way that no man ever could or ever can. He entered into God's presence by his own blood. "Brought again from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant." He could enter into God's presence and say, Father, I have finished on earth the work thou gavest me to do; I have fought the conquest; I have gained the victory; I have redeemed thy children; I have saved their souls. There was none to help, there was none to sympathize; but mine own arm has brought salvation unto me. He therefore entered into God's presence the accepted messenger, the accepted mediator, the accepted substitute. No one could ever enter into God's presence, then, as Christ did. He entered into heaven by his own worth, and we must enter heaven by his worth, not by our own, for we have none. So that that is one of the reasons why he may be called the angel of God's presence. And also because he is God's delight. God has set him before his face forever, and there the Savior lives, and there the Savior reigns, and there he is with his eyes and his heart upon his people that are in heaven, and upon his people that are on earth, and upon them that are yet in a state of nature, to see that the time does not pass by; for when the time shall come the arrow of conviction shall reach their souls; and his eye is upon millions yet unborn; he sees that time in its mysterious progress is bringing about that hour when at his right hand the number that no man can number shall appear in that state into which he himself hath brought them. "In all their afflictions he was afflicted." He endured the penalties of all their sins, and is the angel of God's presence, and by his blood we have boldness to enter the holy of holies. But see the same subject of redemption carried out there in the 63rd of Isaiah by this angel of the Lord — what this angel of the Lord did. "He led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them to make himself an everlasting name." Now take that on to Calvary's cross, for that is the song of Moses — typical of the song of the Lamb, — that that redemption which Christ hath wrought being eternal, he has thereby made himself an everlasting name. The apostle recognizes this when he says, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever." Shall Calvary's cross ever wear out? shall his atonement ever lose its power? Shall his name ever lessen? No, his name on earth shall last as long as the sun and the moon endure, and when time shall be no more, shall light up all heaven with glory, and shall shine on for ever and ever; as it is written, "The glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." His name is Jesus, and he hath thus made himself an everlasting name. And then comes his careful dealing with his people. "He led them through the deep as a horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble." There is the carefulness. And it is said of those that went through the sea, that "there was not one feeble person among them." Of course some were stronger than others, but there was not one so feeble as not to come to the vantage-ground of complete victory. The weak as well as the strong stood on the vantage-ground of victory, and joined in the song of triumph. Just so now — there are some very weak in faith, but weak as they are, they shall lay hold of Christ's victory in the completeness of it, and even little faith shall say, If I can't sing of that victory, I can sigh after it; I can see the suitability of it. I will take my stand there, and there is something about it that just suits me. But then mark the carefulness — "as a horse in the wilderness." I have never met with a better thought upon that scripture than the one thrown out by Dr. Kitto. He says he thinks it has an allusion to the Arabs, who are exceedingly skillful horsemen. They will ride their horses at that rapid rate over precipices, and rocks, and defiles, and rough places about the desert, that it is astounding they do not injure them; but they manage their horses so skillfully that they are scarcely ever known to stumble. This, I think, is a good thought. Now the Lord, then, will lead his people in very difficult paths, yet he will keep them from stumbling at his truth; he will keep them from stumbling at the stumbling-stone; he will keep them from so stumbling as to think about going back again. "He led them through the deep as a horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble." Why, it is right, the Lord will not be angry with us but he will be pleased with us, if we look to him to take great care of us. It is his delight to do so; he wishes us to do so: he tells us to do so. "Cast your care upon him; he careth for you." "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee." He will never suffer the righteous, the man that is justified by faith in Christ Jesus, to be moved. The Lord deals carefully and

skillfully with us. If some of you today have some rather unusual cares, unusual fears, unusual apprehensions, or unusual burdens; if some new difficulty has overtaken you this last week, the Lord then help you to think of his skill, of his carefulness. "He fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands." And he is of the same mind now. He did not love the ancients more than he loves you, and he cannot love you more than he does; he loves you with all his heart, with all his soul. The Lord help you to cast your care upon one that thus "led his people through the deep as a horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble." I am sure of it, that very few of us fully appreciate the care which the Lord exercises over us in taking care of us in ten thousand ways. And then Isaiah works it out a little further, and he says of this angel, "As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name." Now then the beast—that is, the ox—has done his day's work, his yoke is taken off, and he goes down into some nice valley, where there is plenty of pasture, and refreshing springs of water, and lies down and is at rest. So Christ, when the work is done (and we live to know that the work is done), goeth down into the valley. So the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest, to make himself a glorious name. You see it is an everlasting name; and then alter that, in addition to its being everlasting, it is glorious. Is it not just so in experience? When we first saw somewhat of the eternity of this redemption, we did not know that it was so glorious as it is; but by and by, when we enter into rest, when we go down as to our bodies into the valley of the shadow of death, and our souls ascend into the mountainous country, into those everlasting hills where there is no cloud or anything to interrupt, there we shall see that it is indeed a glorious name. Here, then, is eternal redemption.

But, again, this angel of the Lord also is the pattern to which all the people of God are to come; that whatever strength there is in him is for you; that whatever goodness there is in him is for you; and that whatever glory there appears in him is for you. 12th of Zechariah: - "In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem" — meaning, of course, the new Jerusalem, as in the 2nd of Ephesians, — "Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens;" they are the inhabitants of Jerusalem; "and the house of David"— that is, the house of Jesus Christ— "shall be as God; and he that is feeble among them" — I am thankful for that; that is just what I feel from time to time to be my character, - "he that is he that is feeble among them shall be as David" — that is shall be as Christ: then comes the explanation, "as the angel of the Lord before them" He has gone before; our Forerunner has obtained eternal redemption. and, whatever he is, he has constituted the people. If he be holy, if he be exalted, and if he be comforted on every side, and his greatness increased, so shall it be with the people.

But, again, this angel of the Lord appears in another form 3rd of Exodus: - "The angel of the Lord appeared unto Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush." And that same person – I wish you to notice this—who in the 2nd verse is called "the angel of the Lord." doth in that same chapter call himself three times the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. And when Thomas said to the same person "My Lord and my God," the Savior did not contradict him, which he would have done if Thomas had been wrong; but Thomas was right. Three times in this same chapter (3rd of Exodus) doth this angel declare that he is the God of Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob. And once in that chapter declares his eternal self-existence, for so we take it, - "I am that I am" But do not let us pass by the bush. Moses said, "I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." Now if we take the bush -Christ in it -to be a figure of his appearing in the likeness of sinful flesh -let the bush represent the thorns, the sorrows he was under; - he was crowned with thorns, you know; and then apply the words, "this great sight." There is no such great sight to be seen in the whole range of existence as is to be seen in the humiliation work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we see a great work done; here we see the greatness of God's love and mercy; and here we see the infinity of his condescension. "This great sight." And how happy for us if this sight has attracted us, and we have been drawn aside from the world, from self, from all delusion, to look at this great sight

of the dear Savior enduring what he did! "The bush was not consumed;" and so the human nature of Christ was not consumed, it was not even injured. Have you not sometimes thought what a sweet representation it is that Jesus Christ, while in the grave, is described as the Holy One? "Thou wilt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." He is the Holy One still. The fires of our sins and the fires of a fiery law all center upon him, yet he comes out uninjured, un-scathed. It is a great sight to see the dear Savior pass in safety through it all, rise triumphant from the dead, and from the character of a humble plant, a humble shrub, to be the mighty cedar planted upon the mountain of the height of Israel; and all birds of every wing—all sinners of every nation, class, and tongue—shall be drawn to him, and they shall dwell in happiness forever. It is a great sight. And does it not apply to the believer too? Will not each believer feel that he is a great wonder to himself? Surrounded by the fires of sin, of error, of delusion, yet he has escaped the whole, is not consumed, and cannot be consumed;—"preserved in Christ Jesus." And though we are but humble, as it were, defenseless shrubs, and might easily be cut down, or trodden down, or destroyed; yet, if God be in us, they must first destroy God, before that bush can be destroyed. Deity must be destroyed, before the humiliation of Christ can be injured, Deity must be destroyed, before Zion can be destroyed, God himself must be destroyed. He is the salvation round about her; he is the wall of fire, he is the bulwark. he is the glory in the midst; he is her strength, he will help her, and that right early. Mark another thing, if I can say it as I want to say it:—"Put off thy shoes from off thy feet for the place where on thou standest is holy ground." Now Moses, you cannot stand upon holy ground by your own shoes. It is a very homely simile, but you have there the doctrine of substitution. Take off your shoes. You are a debtor, a disgraceful debtor, in debt willfully, you have laughed at it all; let another stand in your shoes and pay your debts, then you will be free. You are a criminal, you a sinner, a condemned and guilty sinner, take off your shoes, let another stand in your shoes and atone for your sins; then you will stand upon holy ground. You are unrighteous, let another stand in your shoes and bring in a righteousness for you, be responsible for you; then by what he shall do you shall stand upon holy ground. The sooner you cast off your old duty-faith, free-will shoes the better. You can stand in the presence of God only by another, and that other is this redeeming Angel, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to step out of our own standing into Christ's standing. He came into our shoes, he came into our place, he stood in our stead; he has met the law with all its demands. This is the angel that sets the prisoner free.

Then see what arises out of this; indeed, time would fail me to mention one-half; but I must just notice one more thought here. I need not remind you that all the blessings pronounced upon Joseph arose out of this that was in the bush. There it is you see. All the blessings in the 33rd of Deuteronomy pronounced upon Joseph, which of course have a spiritual meaning, they all center in "the goodwill of him that dwelt in the bush;" the goodwill of him that was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, who took our image. All the blessings come in that way. They are safe, and the people are all brought by precious faith into this order of things. But three times, we have said, in that third of Exodus does this angel declare himself to be God, "I am the God," he said to Moses, and Moses kept to it. The Savior refers very beautifully to this when he says, "Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he called the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." If Moses had been a dishonest man, he would have at once seen that the doctrines contained in that declaration would made him very unpopular. Why, if I call him the God of Abraham, that is discriminating grace; he called Abraham, and left others; people will not like that. If I call him the God of Isaac, that is yea and amen promise; Ishmael was set aside, and Isaac made the child of promise; people will not like that. And if I call him the God of Jacob, that means that he loved Jacob and did not love Esau; people will not like that. But Moses was not a servant of man though a real servant to man, but a servant of God and therefore spoke as in the sight of God. On this account he could say, give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth,"—called heaven and earth to witness that he was an honest man before God. God proclaimed his name. Now, Moses, while that is the name by which you are to call me, the next thing you are to do is this,—you go

to the children of Israel, and tell them that the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, hath appeared unto you, and tell them I will have no alteration. "This is my name forever," call me by any other if you dare, "and this is my memorial unto all generations." I will be known to all the seed of Abraham as I was known to Abraham himself; I will be known to all the children of promise as I was known to the child of promise Isaac; I will be known to all the seed of Jacob as I was known to Jacob himself; Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel." Had it been the lot of the children of Israel to have entertained those doctrines, viewed them, and somewhat abode by them, they never would have set up golden calves, and said, "These are thy gods: they never would have turned back again to Egypt; they never would have said, "Let us make a captain, and let us return to Egypt;" No: and so did not those among them that understood God's truth; but of the main body it was unhappily true that "this people do always err in their heats, for they have not known my ways". And there is no doubt that some of them felt offended at the declaration that Moses made, and at the doctrines he brought; nevertheless, their unbelief could not make these doctrines of none effect to others. And now, Moses, "go and gather the elders of Israel together," —the ministers, go and give them a charge; "and say unto them, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham —the same, you see, — "of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me. Tell this to the elders, so that the captain over ten, the captain over fifty, over a hundred, over a thousand, or over ten thousand, may all preach the same things to their congregations; and then there will be unity, harmony, and oneness; God will be known, God will be honored, God will be glorified, truth will reign triumphant, Satan cast down, and souls be saved. God meant this. and he has done this, and all this is embodied in the Angel, the God of Abraham, discriminating grace; and where is that but in Christ? And he is a God of promise; where is that but in Christ? And a God of love; where is the love but in Christ? And then mark the next thing; see what arises out of this, "I have seen the affliction of my people;" here is the message of the messenger, "I have seen the addiction of my people." Is it possible that one of his own children is in trouble, and that one writing bitter things against himself, and saying, Well, the Lord has dealt bitterly with me, or rather, he does not deal with me at all; I do not think he has anything to do with me; if he had, I should not be thus, and thus, and the other? He sees the affliction; he has not come to alter it yet; it will grow worse yet. For when Moses first came to them, why. their burdens became heavier. "And I have heard their cry by reason of their task- masters." I have seen, and I have heard, "and I am come down." Lord, lead us into a full understanding of the meaning of such words as those. Oh, what a come down was that on the part of the Savior as described in the 69th Psalm! — "I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me." And again, in the 42nd Psalm, "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." Jonah says, "I went down to the bottoms of the mountains." So the Savior went down to the bottoms of the mountains of our sins, and overturned those mountains by the roots. "I am come down." It was a great condescension for God to come down by the paschal lamb and by his presence, as he did there; but the greatness of the meaning lies in the depths into which the Savior went, — "I am come down to deliver them." I will come down to earth and be a babe in Bethlehem 's manger; I will be a man of sorrows; I will come under their sins, and under their sorrows, and under the demands of the law; I will come down into the dust of death. "I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land;" the gospel land is a good land nothing but goodness in it —not like the typical land: in the typical land there were bad people; but here, in the antitypical, there is not one bad person, for none can enter into the antitypical land but by regeneration and regeneration turns a sinner into a saint, regeneration turns an enemy, into a friend, regeneration turns the unclean into the clean, the unrighteous into the righteous, and the carnal into the spiritual. What a wonderful revolution doth regeneration work in the soul! "A good land and a larger —large; heaven is not a little place. You must not suppose you are going to be crowded together there, and hardly get room to breathe, - "a good land and large;" a land flowing with milk and honey; "a land that the Lord thy God careth for, a land that the Lord thy God hath chosen; a holy land, a pleasant land.

Much more might be said upon this subject. I have just glanced at his redemption, and at his being the pattern to which we are to be conformed at the last, as typified by this great sight. "The bush was not consumed;" Christ was not consumed. If Satan could have been chemist enough to get up some sort of Lucifer match of sin that would have laid hold of the Savior's nature and burnt it till it made a little spot, that would have spoiled the whole. But he could not —no. The serpent worked hard upon the rock, but found not one vulnerable place. Whereas with us he finds not one invulnerable place. "There is no soundness in my flesh," but there was no unsoundness in the Savior's flesh. No holiness in our flesh; no un-holiness in his flesh. No goodness in our flesh, - "In my flesh dwelleth no good thing." But in him dwelt no evil; in him was no sin; he came off victorious at the last.

And now shall I say a word about the anathema? I think the main substance I must keep until another Sunday morning. You will at once perceive the language is very solemn; and there is in the closing up of this text a great peculiarity. which I will not now stop to notice.

There were, which I may just name in conclusion, five ends which I had in view when this text impressed itself upon my mind. For I go a great deal by first impressions in these things. When I have been meditating, and praying to the Lord in private, and when a particular scripture comes with light, and life, and power, and seems to make itself mine, and appears like a message from God's throne, as these words did, I do not try to get away from it. I will just state then the five ends which I had in view in taking these words: First, as I hope to show in all solemnity when I come to that part, the awfulness of mere profession -to be destitute of that faith that is practical. You perceive there is nothing said about the people opposing it was not what they did do, but what they did not do. I thought it was profitable for us to contemplate that. The second end I had in view was that if there are any among us that serve the Lord in a half-hearted sort of way, it may be a word of quickening and life unto them. The third end I had in view was to show how those that do practically serve the Lord, that are rich in good works, how fully they are sanctioned, and, shall I say, patronized, by the God that made them; so that what a peace there is in thus doing! The fourth end I had in view was to show what great importance the Lord kindly attaches to our little, our humble, but sincere and cheerful services. He seems to say, Let me have a few of these little doings, that I may treasure them up as tokens of your love. I have put away your sins, and I will bring up your little, humble, cheerful doings at the last great day, and in the presence of all the world declare them to be evidences that you are mine. And the fifth end I had in view was to show that if the Lord is pleased to bless us with confidence in him, why, then it matters not what service we have to perform. Go to the 11th of the Hebrews, and see what the ancients did, and see what the people of God have done since, and what they shall do. "The blessing of the Lord maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow." Even among us some said, What do we want with a new chapel? Why, it is enough to make one tremble at the thought. What! you plucked as a brand from the everlasting burning, a servant of God, an heir of glory, a friend to God a soldier of the cross, and care nought whether souls are saved or lost; care nought whether the word succeeds or does not succeed; care nought whether your minister speaks to half a dozen or to a thousand! "Get thee behind me, Satan thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." God have mercy upon such, deliver them, and grant that their future life may prove that they are convinced of their mistake, and that their faith in God may enable them to serve him with all that reverence, liberality, and care, that shall demonstrate they are the people of God, who shall be found at the last at the Savior's right hand.