

'The Father sent the Son'.

The Lord Jesus is given the title 'Saviour' no less than sixteen times in the New Testament.¹ Today I want us to consider the last of the sixteen references ... the words of the apostle John in what we know as his first epistle: 'We ('we the apostles', that is) have seen and testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world'.²

'The Father sent the Son'. Did John, I wonder, have in his mind³ the parable told by the Lord Jesus just before His death concerning the vineyard owner who sent a succession of servants to collect the fruit of his vineyard from his tenants, all of whom (his servants) were either beaten or killed. 'Last of all', Jesus had said, 'he sent his son' ('his only son, his beloved'⁴) to them'.⁵

'Him', Jesus added, 'they took, threw out of the vineyard and killed'.⁶

The meaning of that parable was not lost on the chief priests and Pharisees for whose benefit the Lord had told it.⁷ But neither, I suspect, was it lost on the apostle John in later days.

John knew well that, over many centuries, God had sent a long succession of prophets,⁸ many of whom had received very rough treatment at the hands of the leaders of the nation.⁹ This succession of prophets terminated in the person of John the Baptist. 'There was', the apostle wrote, 'a man sent from God, whose name was John'.¹⁰

But we know that God had '*sent not only men*'. But that, over the centuries, He had '*sent angels also*', and that on a wide variety of missions.¹¹

Let us consider four such occasions.

First, there was the case of Sennacherib's assault on Jerusalem.¹²

We read, both in 2 Kings 18 and Isaiah 36, of the time when the loud-mouthed Rabshakeh of Assyria sounded off, more than once, to King Hezekiah and the Jews who were then besieged in Jerusalem, about 'the great king, the king of Assyria'.¹³

But then we read how, following the prayers and cries to heaven of Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah,¹⁴ this same so-called 'great king' (Sennacherib) was compelled to return home to his capital of Nineveh, like a dog with his tail between his legs. 'He returned *with shame of face* to his own land', the inspired record says.¹⁵

Following which, we discover that, 'as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him down with the sword'.¹⁶ 'Ironically', one commentator observes,¹⁷ 'the Assyrian king suffered assassination in the temple of *his god, who was not able to deliver him*. This was the very thing he had charged (the Lord) with being unable to do for Judah'.¹⁸

'Great king', indeed!

And Sennacherib's critically important defeat took place courtesy of the efforts of *just one angel* during a single night. The biblical text explains that, 'the Lord **sent an angel**, who cut off all the mighty warriors ... and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria'.¹⁹ In further detail, we are told that '*an angel of the Lord* went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and eighty-five thousand'.²⁰

And I say 'critically important defeat' deliberately, because, at the time of Sennacherib's campaign, Hezekiah had no son to continue the all-important Davidic (and Messianic) line!²¹

Had Sennacherib's attack proved successful, and Jerusalem fallen, even if Hezekiah had survived his defeat, we can have no doubt that he would have been dragged off to prison in Assyria, just as Hoshea (the last king of the northern kingdom) had been when Samaria had fallen to Assyria some twenty years before.²²

In that event, the Davidic (and Messianic) line would have come to an abrupt end with Hezekiah, and *there would not have been a 'Saviour of the world'!*²³ How thankful we should be therefore that 'the Lord sent an angel' that night!

King David claimed that God's angels are 'mighty in strength'.²⁴ If you have any doubt about that, you have only to ask Sennacherib!

The Lord sent an angel'.

Second, there was the case of Daniel's three companions (Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah).

On account of their refusal to fall down and to worship the colossal golden image²⁵ erected by Nebuchadnezzar in the plain of Dura, these three friends of Daniel were thrown into Babylon's abnormally-hot blazing fiery furnace.²⁶

It was maliciously reported to the king that, at the time when the publicised musical signal was given at the dedication of the golden image, three Jewish senior officials had refused to fall down and worship before the image.

Nebuchadnezzar was not amused, and flew into a 'furious rage'.²⁷ It has been well said, 'How little was it the honour of this mighty prince that he had rule over so many nations when at the same time *he had no rule over his own spirit*,²⁸ that there were so many who were subjects and captives to him when he was himself a perfect slave to his own brutish passions and led captive by them!²⁹

In effect, Nebuchadnezzar's ultimatum to the three courageous young men can be reduced to three words, 'Turn or burn!' He made it clear to them that, if they persisted in refusing to fall down and worship his golden image, they would land themselves in *more than 'hot water'*!

To which the *king of Babylon* then added his defiant challenge, '*who is the god* who will deliver you out of my hands?'³⁰ Such a challenge echoed well the similar challenge issued by the *king of Assyria* (Sennacherib) to the Jews back in the days of Hezekiah.³¹ Both kings soon found out who that God was!

For his part, Nebuchadnezzar was shortly to acknowledge concerning 'the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego', that 'there is *no other god* that is able to deliver in this way'.³² Oh yes, the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego most certainly 'delivered His servants'.³³ But, crucial for our purpose now, is how He did it. But of that, more anon.

As Moses of old, 'not fearing the wrath of the king',³⁴ the three young men responded to the king's ultimatum with the brave words, 'our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up'.³⁵

'Our God whom we serve *is able* to deliver us', they confidently asserted. And, for our part, we can confidently (and joyfully) assert that our God 'is able':

- (i) to build us up;³⁶
- (ii) to do what He has promised;³⁷
- (iii) to make us stand;³⁸
- (iii) to strengthen us;³⁹
- (iv) to make all grace abound toward us;⁴⁰
- (v) to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think;⁴¹
- (vi) to guard the entrusted deposit;⁴²and
- (vii) to keep us from stumbling.⁴³

'He will deliver us ... But if not', the three young men declared. Had they wished, they could have truthfully prayed the words with which a man full of leprosy many centuries later implored the Lord Jesus, 'If you will, you can!'⁴⁴

Acting in faith,⁴⁵ they (in the later words of Nebuchadnezzar himself) 'yielded up their bodies'.⁴⁶ And we hardly need to be reminded that the mercies ('the compassions') of God require no less a living sacrifice *from us!*⁴⁷

But, no sooner were Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah⁴⁸ cast bound into the furnace, than Nebuchadnezzar, dumbfounded and alarmed,⁴⁹ leapt to his feet exclaiming, 'I see four men ... walking unharmed in the midst of the fire, and the appearance of the fourth is *like a son of the gods*'.⁵⁰

Quite understandably, when Nebuchadnezzar ventured near the door of the fiery furnace and called for the three young men to 'come out', he made no mention of the fourth 'person', for possibly by that time the fourth 'person' had vanished, apart from which the king knew no name for him.

Wonderfully, the same fire which had burnt away the ropes or cords with which the three young men had been bound, and thus set them free,⁵¹ had not so much as singed the hair of their heads or left its smell on them, let alone consumed their clothing⁵² or harmed them⁵³ in any way.

Several hundred years before, another king⁵⁴ had asked, 'Can one walk on hot coals and *his feet not be scorched?*' With Daniel 3 before me, I guess the answer must be 'Yes!'

And here in Daniel 3 we witness a very *literal* fulfilment of words likely spoken *symbolically* by the Lord to the exiles through one of Israel's greatest prophets, 'when you walk through fire *you shall not be burned, neither shall the flame consume you*'.⁵⁵

The 'mighty men' who had bound and cast the three young Jews into the furnace didn't come off so well! Clearly, the supposed gods of Babylon could not save their devotees from the heat of the flames (even though those devotees *came no nearer than the mouth of the furnace*),⁵⁶ whereas 'the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego'⁵⁷ proved Himself well able to deliver His servants when they were '*in the midst of the fire*'!⁵⁸ Game, set and match to Jehovah!

Oh yes, God had most certainly 'delivered His servants' alright. But, *how*, pray, *had He done it*?

What does scripture say? This ... that, when the three young men emerged from the furnace unharmed, with hair unsinged, with cloaks undamaged, and without so much as the smell of smoke on them, Nebuchadnezzar responded, 'Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has **sent His angel**, and delivered His servants who trusted in Him'.

Here then we have a second successful mission to chalk up to one of the celestial host!

'God ... sent His angel'.

Third, there was the case of Daniel himself many years later, who was cast⁵⁹ (not, as his three friends, into a fiery furnace, but) into a den of lions.

One commentator wrote, 'Where was Daniel when his three friends were tested by the fiery furnace? It is not known: but now as (his) life is well advanced, an equally severe test reveals that he, like them, has strength to be faithful unto death'.⁶⁰ And it is in Daniel 6 that we read of that 'severe test'.

It all began with a decree passed by King Darius ('Darius the Mede'⁶¹)

Daniel, now well in his eighties, was one of three 'presidents' appointed by Darius over his vast kingdom. Because Daniel distinguished himself above the other two, the king planned 'to set him over the whole kingdom' – in effect to elevate him to the office of Prime Minister.⁶²

Seemingly motivated by envy, the other two presidents, together with the provincial governors ('Satraps'), attempted to eliminate Daniel. But they found that this was easier said than done. For Daniel had shown himself to be both very competent professionally and a man of the highest integrity. The men could find no skeletons in Daniel's cupboard!⁶³

Daniel had never made any secret of his Jewish nationality,⁶⁴ and he had openly observed his set prayer times.⁶⁵ So his enemies schemed to attack him on that front.⁶⁶ They proposed that the king pass a decree banning all religious petitions for a whole month, and requiring that, throughout that month, all petitions be directed to him personally. As likely as not, this proposal proved acceptable to Darius as a means of underlining his authority over the former Babylonian empire, and of unifying the empire. But, for whatever reason, the king signed up.⁶⁷

And we should perhaps note that, although aimed by Daniel's enemies at him personally, the decree would have encompassed all of God's people throughout the Persian empire! If the law was not nullified, every Jew would have been prevented from praying legally to their God, and every faithful Jew could therefore have been charged, convicted, and executed.

Before we pass on, I want us to pause for a moment to consider a challenge issued by Charles Spurgeon to his flock back in 1874:

'*Suppose* the law of the land were proclaimed, "No man shall pray during the remainder of this month, on pain of being cast into a den of lions", how many of *you* would pray? I think there would be rather a scanty number at the prayer-meeting'.⁶⁸

Some food for thought there.

But back to Daniel – and the subject of cat food!

Although the king may not have thought through the implications of the decree which he signed, Daniel certainly did.

For Daniel, the issue was rather different than that which had earlier faced Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego at the fiery burning furnace. It has been well observed that 'It is *not*, as with his three companions in chapter 3 a question of *a positive sin which he will not commit* (as it had been with them), but of a *positive duty which he will not omit*'.⁶⁹

With a sideways glance at a well-known quotation from Shakespeare's play Hamlet,⁷⁰ we might say that the issue was, '*To pray or not to pray, that is the question*'. Or, better, with a sideways glance at the apostles' answer to the Jewish Sanhedrin, we might say that the issue was, '*To obey God or to obey men*'.⁷¹

Daniel did not hesitate for a single moment.

'*When Daniel knew* that the document had been signed', he not only prayed, but he prayed as often as he had always done ... in the same place, with the same physical posture, and with the same calm indifference to publicity ... making no attempt at concealment, with the windows of his upper chamber wide open towards Jerusalem.⁷²

And when I read that Daniel '*knelt ... and prayed ... as he did previously*', I think of One immeasurably greater than Daniel (when facing an ordeal which eclipsed to the nth degree any number of lions' dens) who '*went as was His custom ... knelt and prayed!*'⁷³

Try to grasp this, that Daniel would rather spend a night with lions than spend a day without prayer. Let me say that again, *Daniel would rather spend a night with lions than spend a day without prayer!*

There are three points to note in verse 10:

(i) Daniel's open windows and his prayers were '*toward Jerusalem*'. We know from chapter 9 that he was familiar with the prophecy of Jeremiah.⁷⁴ It seems from this verse that he also knew the words of Solomon, 'If your people ... are carried away captive to the land of the enemy ... and pray to you *toward ... the city that you have chosen ...* then hear in heaven your dwelling place'⁷⁵. But Daniel not only knew Solomon's words; he acted on them!

(ii) 'He knelt on his knees *three times a day*'. 'Three times a day' for prayer was evidently the practice of godly Jews dating back at least to the time of David ('Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and He shall hear my voice'⁷⁶), a custom carried on by some at least in the early Christian church ('Pray ... three times each day'⁷⁷).

(iii) 'And prayed and *gave thanks* before his God'. One of the Puritans drew attention to the fact that 'Daniel, when in the very shadow of death, the plot being laid to take away his life, prayed three times a day, and gave thanks before his God. To have heard him pray in that great strait would not have afforded so much matter for wonder; but to have *his heart in tune for giving thanks in such a sad hour was admirable*'.⁷⁸ 'Admirable' indeed, and a great example to us all. On several occasions, the apostle Paul made it clear that prayer and thanksgiving should always ascend to heaven arm in arm.⁷⁹

King Darius responded to the adverse report about Daniel *very* differently than his predecessor (Nebuchadnezzar) did to the adverse report about Daniel's three friends. As we have seen, when told of the refusal of the three young Jews to bow down to his image, Nebuchadnezzar was beside himself with rage and determined to have them burnt to ashes,⁸⁰ whereas Darius was greatly distressed and devoted the remaining daylight hours to trying to deliver Daniel from the lion's den.

But, having failed to find any escape from the irreversible decree which he himself had signed, and recognising that he had been well and truly checkmated by Daniel's accusers, he had no choice but to see that the prescribed penalty was meted out.

And so '*Daniel to the lions*'.⁸¹

'A stone was brought', we read, 'and laid upon the mouth of the den; and (reluctantly, no doubt) the king sealed it with his own signet',⁸² presumably to ensure that no attempt was made by anyone to rescue Daniel.

It would be difficult not to contrast this 'stone' and 'seal' with the stone rolled to the door of our Lord's tomb, and with the seal⁸³ which was applied to that stone.⁸⁴ The function of the seal in the case of *Jesus* was to prevent anyone *removing a dead body*; the function of the seal in the case of *Daniel* was to prevent anyone *releasing a living man*.

The long hours of that night certainly tested the faith of the king. When the night began, he expressed his confidence to Daniel that '*Your God* whom you serve continually *will deliver you*',⁸⁵ whereas, come break of day, his confident 'your God ... will' has faded into the doleful question, '*Is your God* whom you serve continually *able to deliver you?*'⁸⁶ And there is a whole world of difference between asserting 'God *is able*' and questioning '*Is God able!*'

In the event, it is clear that Daniel spent that night more comfortably than did Darius, for the king's 'sleep fled from him'.⁸⁷ It is probably not fanciful to imagine (with a Bible teacher of a bygone day) that 'all through the night King Darius tossed upon his bed and Daniel rested calmly in the den of lions, confident in God'.⁸⁸

That 'confident in God' captures it well. For the writer to the Hebrews assures us that it was '*through faith*' that someone [and I am offering no prizes for guessing who he had in mind!] '*stopped the mouths of lions*'.⁸⁹

The psalmist has told us that 'the young lions roar after their prey, and seek their food from God'.⁹⁰ Well, this was one occasion when God saw fit to *deny the lions their 'midnight feast'*! But there is no need to feel sorry for the lions; they would eat well for breakfast!⁹¹

And, for his part, *Darius readily acknowledged that 'the God of Daniel ... the living God' had accomplished that which he had singularly failed to do himself. 'He has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions'*⁹² ... '*the king set his heart on Daniel to deliver him*'.⁹³

Oh yes, God had most certainly 'delivered Daniel' alright. But again we must ask, how had He done it?

Well, what does scripture say? This ... that, when, at first light, King Darius rushed to the den and found Daniel alive and well, 'Daniel', we read, 'said, "O king ... my God **sent His angel** and shut the lions' mouths, that they have not harmed me'.⁹⁴

So yet another successful mission accomplished by one of 'the heavenly host'!⁹⁵

'My God sent His angel'.

Fourth and last, and turning now to the New Testament, there was the case of the apostle Peter in Acts chapter 12.

We are now in the days of King Herod Agrippa I (the grandson of Herod the Great), who, on account of his strong Jewish feelings, first had the apostle James put to death with a sword, and then had Peter imprisoned with the clear intention of having him executed in the near future.

Acts 12 forms the last major narrative which portrays Peter as the central human character. We can hardly miss the irony that Herod, who, in the opening section of the chapter, arrested Peter to 'please' God-fearing Jews,⁹⁶ in the last section, himself happily accepted the worship of idolatrous Gentiles.⁹⁷ For his part, Peter refused to fear 'those who kill the body',⁹⁸ but, for his part, Herod failed to fear Him who could not only kill but who had the authority 'to cast into Gehenna'!⁹⁹

At a Passover festival a little over 10 years previously,¹⁰⁰ Peter had declared his willingness to face 'both prison and death' for Jesus.¹⁰¹ At that time, he had proved unwilling to do either.¹⁰² But, post Pentecost, Peter was a changed man!

Herod intended 'after the Passover to bring him out to the people ... but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church'.¹⁰³ In one sense, the burning question was, '*Which would prevail, the plans of Herod or the prayers of the church?*'

At almost the last moment ('when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night'¹⁰⁴), an angel disturbed Peter's sound sleep.¹⁰⁵ I say 'sound sleep' deliberately! It has been well said that, 'he was sleeping so soundly that even the sudden light didn't appear to awaken him. *It needed a sharp thump in the ribs to do that!*'¹⁰⁶ And, even after the angel's blow woke him, Peter still believed that it was 'a vision' until he was out in the cool night air.¹⁰⁷

'A sharp thump in the ribs' it may have been. But Peter had every reason to be thankful that 'the angel of the Lord' didn't '*smite*' ('*strike*') *him*¹⁰⁸ in the same way that the angel would later '*smite*' ('*strike*') *Herod!*¹⁰⁹ Now the angel's blow kick-started *Peter's deliverance*, whereas the angel's later blow would bring about *Herod's demise*.

Peter has the distinction of being the New Testament counterpart of the Old Testament prophet Elijah, who (when *his* life was under threat, not from *a king*, but from *a queen*) was roused from sleep (twice) by the 'touch' of an angel.¹¹⁰

It may seem remarkable that any man could ever enjoy 'sound sleep' in Peter's situation. But then we know that the apostle had in his favour the clear prediction of our Lord concerning that which would befall him 'when', as the risen Lord said to him, 'you are *old*'.¹¹¹ And Peter didn't have to consult his birth certificate for him to know that he didn't fall into that category yet!

In his first volume, Luke had noted two previous occasions when Peter had slept,¹¹² on both of which Peter had missed the most amazing of scenes. But on this occasion, Peter hasn't missed anything; *the action is only now about to begin!*¹¹³

The poet captured the moment well:

'He lies upon the dungeon floor,
A guard, quadrupled round the door,
Its midnight vigil keeps;¹¹⁴
Two chains of iron bind him fast;
Tomorrow's morn shall be his last
*And - Peter sleeps!*¹¹⁵

In contrast to the human enquirers who had once needed to enquire about Peter's whereabouts,¹¹⁶ the angel didn't need to ask anyone for directions: 'behold', we read, 'an angel of the Lord stood next to him!'

Having regard to his previous experiences of visions,¹¹⁷ we must surely excuse the apostle for his initial impression that everything which he saw amounted to nothing more than 'a vision'.¹¹⁸

Our Lord taught that, more readily than any theoretical unjust and reluctant judge, God hears and grants speedily the petitions of those who cry to him day and night.¹¹⁹ Here, in response to the fervent prayer of the Jerusalem church, God speedily delivers Peter from a *real* unjust judge.

God, Peter said, 'delivered me out of the hand of Herod',¹²⁰ *delivered him out*, that is, *of the hand of the man who had 'stretched out his hands to oppress'*¹²¹ certain of the church'.¹²²

As one of the Puritans astutely noted, '*The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer fetched the angel*'.

And, no sooner than at liberty and fully orientated, Peter made a beeline for the nearby house where he knew he would find some of the saints assembled,¹²³ that he might (i) inform them of all that had happened to him, and (ii) give them instructions to pass on the glad news to others of the praying church.¹²⁴

Ah, but ... but *gaining access to the saints wasn't going to prove as easy as Peter thought*. For he soon discovered that *it had been easier by far getting out of Herod's prison than it would ever be getting into the believers' prayer meeting!* But then again, he now had no angel to open shut gates or doors for him!¹²⁵

To begin with, the servant girl (Rhoda, by name) who responded to his knocking,¹²⁶ and who immediately recognised Peter's voice,¹²⁷ was so overwhelmed with joy that she omitted to open the door!¹²⁸ I chuckle when I think that, although *Herod's guards failed to keep Peter inside*, young Rhoda *inadvertently* (but very successfully) *kept Peter outside*.

Long before, Peter had encountered a pair of very different 'servant girls'.¹²⁹ At that time, the girls had *accused* Peter to those around them, and *he had feared arrest* because he was a follower of Jesus; now the girl *announced* Peter's presence to those around her, after *he had been arrested* because he was a follower of Jesus.

It is ironic that shortly *after Peter had 'come to his senses'*,¹³⁰ *the gathered believers accused young Rhoda of having lost hers!*¹³¹ Clearly, they were as slow to believe that Peter was actually out of the prison as he himself had been at first.¹³²

Without wishing to introduce undue levity, I recall reading an amusing story about a young girl who wrote a letter to a missionary to assure him that people were praying for him and to let him know that she also wanted to support him. Evidently she had been told that, because missionaries are very busy people, she was *not to request a reply* to her letter. I leave you to imagine the kick which the missionary got out of reading her letter: 'Dear Mr Missionary, we are praying for you. But *we are not expecting an answer*'.¹³³

But, before we rush to criticise these dear saints for any lack of faith on their part in, possibly, 'not expecting an answer' to their earnest prayers, we need to remember that they had been praying against the background of the unexpected death of another of the original apostles!¹³⁴

Let us re-join Peter, still pounding on the door,¹³⁵ and perhaps smiling to himself as he reflected on the way that, whereas *the prison iron gate which led to the city had opened 'of its own accord' to let him out*,¹³⁶ he was now having no small difficulty getting somebody to *open the door of Mark's mother's house to let him in*.

When Peter did finally gain admittance, he related to the astonished company gathered there 'how the Lord had brought him out of the prison'.¹³⁷ But, 'how', I must ask, 'had the Lord brought him out of the prison'?

Yes, of course ... as Peter had told himself when first set free, 'the Lord **sent His angel** and has delivered me'.

Here then we encounter a fourth mission successfully accomplished by one of 'the host of the Lord'¹³⁸

'The Lord sent His angel'.

Oh yes, **angels could be 'sent'** by and from God to 'deliver' men:

- (i) from *the army of Sennacherib*,
- (ii) from *the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar*,
- (iii) from *the lions of Darius*, and
- (iv) from *the sword of Herod Antipas*.

But *no angel*¹³⁹ could be sent to deliver men (in the words of the New Testament epistles) from (i) *the power of darkness*,¹⁴⁰ (ii) *the fear of death*,¹⁴¹ or (iii) *the wrath to come*.¹⁴² No way!

No angel could be sent to deliver men from their sins. Which is why, as John had written just four verses before my text today, 'God ...*sent His Son* to be the propitiation for *our sins*'.¹⁴³

And let us remember that not one of the missions performed by angels *involved them in any cost* whatever. Being 'sent' by God entailed no loss or suffering for them.

But I don't need to tell you that it was very different for our Lord Jesus. As John expressed it back in his first chapter, it is 'the blood (the sacrificial death) of Jesus His (God's) Son' which alone 'cleanses us from all sin'.¹⁴⁴

No angel could be 'the Saviour of the world' (of the human race), in part at least because *no angel could ever become a man*.¹⁴⁵ Oh yes, (i) an angel could *look like* a man,¹⁴⁶ (ii) an angel could *speak like* a man,¹⁴⁷ and (iii) an angel could even *eat like* a man.¹⁴⁸ But in no way could an angel ever *become* a man ... as God's Son did.

And then, *no angel* could be 'the Saviour of the world' because *no angel could ever die*, and thereby 'take away the sin of the world'¹⁴⁹ ... as God's Son did.

In His dispute with the Sadducees about resurrection, our Lord made it clear that, when men rise, 'they *cannot die* anymore, because they are *equal to angels*'.¹⁵⁰

As we noted earlier, *angels can slay men*, and we learn from the Book of the Revelation that *angels will loudly proclaim the worth of the One who was slain* to redeem men¹⁵¹ ... but *angels cannot themselves be slain*.

An angel could be sent by God to bring Jesus' name (meaning 'the Lord is *salvation*') for Him from heaven to the virgin Mary.¹⁵² *An angel could be sent by God* to explain the significance of that name to Joseph, that Jesus was to '*save* His people from their sins'.¹⁵³ And *an angel could be sent by God* to proclaim His coming as '*a Saviour*' to humble shepherds.¹⁵⁴

But *no angel could ever be sent by God 'to be*, as John wrote concerning our Lord, '*the Saviour of the world*'.¹⁵⁵

And we need to remind ourselves that the Son whom the Father '*sent*' to be a Saviour, Himself '*came*', willingly and gladly, to save. As He declared to Zacchaeus, 'the Son of man has *come* to seek and *to save* that which was lost'.¹⁵⁶ Yes indeed, as we know so well, 'Christ Jesus *came* into the world *to save* sinners'.¹⁵⁷

With all this in mind, I close by quoting the opening words of William Fullerton's hymn, 'I cannot tell':

I cannot tell why He whom angels worship
Should set His love upon the sons of men ...
But this I know, that He was born of Mary ...
And so the Saviour, *Saviour of the world*, has come.¹⁵⁸

Notes

¹ Luke 2. 11; John 4. 42; Acts 5. 31; 13. 23; Eph. 5. 23; Phil. 3.20; 2 Tim. 1. 10; Tit. 1. 4; 2. 13; 3. 6; 2 Pet. 1. 1, 11; 2. 20; 3. 2, 18; 1 John 4. 14.

² 1 John 4. 14.

The only other occurrence of the title '*the Saviour of the world*' is in John 4, where we read that the Samaritans from Sychar 'said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed ('this really is', 'this truly is') *the Saviour of the world* ('of the whole human race, without distinction')'", John 4. 42.

The *true* 'Saviour of the world' was certainly *not* the Roman emperor, either when our Lord was here or when John wrote his first epistle. Note the following five revealing background quotations:

(i) '...in no part of the world was there such fervent and sincere loyalty to the emperors as in Asia. *Augustus* had been a saviour to the Asian peoples, and they deified him as *the Saviour of mankind*, and worshiped him with the most whole-hearted devotion as the "present deity"', W. Ramsay, '*The Letters to the Seven Churches*', page 115.

(ii) 'The full title of honour, "*Saviour of the world*" with which St. John adorns the Master, was bestowed with sundry variations in the Greek expression on Julius Caesar, Augustus, Claudius, Vespasian, Titus, Trajan, Hadrian, and other Emperors in inscriptions of the Hellenistic East. The exact Johannine term is specially common in inscriptions for Hadrian ... On his accession Nero was venerated in the East as "Saviour of the world"', Adolf Deissmann, '*Light from the Ancient East*' (fourth edition), page 364.

(iii) 'Propertius the poet described the same Augustus as "*mundi salvator*", *the Saviour of the world*. Even an Emperor like Claudius was described as, 'God manifest, our god Caesar, *Saviour of the world* ... men called Aesculapius '*Saviour of the world*', William Barclay, '*Jesus as they knew Him*', pages 211-212. (It is clear from page 211 that by 'the world' was understood 'the whole human race'.)

(iv) The Priene calendar inscription, circa 9 BC, says, 'providence ... has ordered things in sending Augustus, whom she filled with virtue for the benefit of men, sending him as a *saviour* both for us and for those after us', <http://textexcavation.com/augustus.html>.

(v) There is an inscription under a statue of Caesar Augustus in Myra in Lycia, 'The God Augustus, Son of God, Caesar, absolute ruler of land and sea, the benefactor and *Saviour of the whole cosmos*, the people of Myra have set up this statue' ... accessed at <http://people.uncw.edu/zervosg/Pr236/New%20236/Augustus.htm>.

³ John 14. 26.

⁴ Mark 12. 6.

⁵ Matt. 21. 37.

⁶ Matt. 21. 39.

⁷ Mark 12. 12.

⁸ Abraham was the first man to be designated 'a prophet' in the Old Testament, Gen. 20. 7. (I am assuming that our Lord's words in Luke 11. 50-51 do *not* mean that Abel came into the category of 'prophet'.) As far as I know, Moses was next, Deut. 18. 18; 34. 10; Hos. 12. 13. Then there was the unnamed prophet 'sent' shortly before God called Gideon, Judg. 6. 8.

⁹ 2 Chron. 36. 16; Neh. 9. 26; Matt. 23. 29-31, 37; Luke 6. 23; 11. 50; Acts 7. 52; James 5. 10.

¹⁰ John 1. 6.

¹¹ For example, see 1 Chron. 21. 15; Luke 1. 19, 26; Acts 27. 23-24; Rev. 22. 6, 16.

¹² In spite of his well-known claim concerning 'Hezekiah the Judahite', that '(Hezekiah) himself, like a bird in a cage, I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city. I threw up earthworks against him'), it is clear that Sennacherib did *not actually besiege Jerusalem*; 'he shall *not* ... cast up a siege mound against it', 2 Kings 19. 32 // Isa. 37. 33. (I have taken the Sennacherib quotation from D. D. Luckenbill's translation of Column 3 of the 'Sennacherib Prism'.)

¹³ 2 Kings 18. 19, 28; Isa. 36. 4, 13.

¹⁴ 2 Chron. 32. 20.

¹⁵ 2 Chron. 32. 21.

¹⁶ 2 Kings 19. 37.

¹⁷ Thomas Constable, '*Expository Notes*', on 2 Kings 19. 20-37.

¹⁸ 2 Chron. 32. 14.

¹⁹ 2 Chron. 32. 20-21.

²⁰ 2 Kings 19. 35. For the translation 'an angel', see J. N. D. and the Septuagint.

²¹ I reach this conclusion because Manasseh was born three year's into Hezekiah's extended lifespan (2 Kings 20. 6 with 2 Kings 21. 1), and it was Manasseh who provided the next link in the all-important Davidic line (Matt. 1. 10). Hezekiah's prayer, and God's gracious answer of a fifteen year extension of his life, took place either 'during, or just prior to, Sennacherib's invasion', Leon Wood, 'A Survey of Israel's History', page 361; cf. Eugene Merrill, 'Kingdom of Priests', pages 4-17-418. Note especially the connection made by the Lord between (i) Hezekiah's sickness and (ii) the planned attack on Jerusalem, 'I will *add fifteen years to your life, and I will deliver you* and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria' 2 Chron. 20. 6.

²² 2 Kings 17. 4.

²³ We might also consider the following suggestion. In a book entitled 'What if?' (edited by Robert Cowley, and published by Pan Books), secular historian William H. McNeill wrote as follows: '*What if Sennacherib, King of Assyria, had conquered Jerusalem in 701 BC ... Jerusalem's preservation from attack by Sennacherib's army shaped the subsequent history of the world far more profoundly than any military action I know of ... (Unlike in the case of the northern kingdom of Israel following the fall of Samaria to Shalmaneser V), the exiled people of Judah did not pine away. Instead they flourished by the waters of Babylon, and ... subsequently gave birth to Christianity and Islam, the two most powerful religions of our age, and of course retains its own, distinctive following around the world and especially in the contemporary state of Israel. None of this would have come to pass if the kingdom of Judah had disappeared in 701 BC*'; quoted from Ross Prout at ...

http://www.generationword.com/notes_for_notesbooks_pg/isaiah/isaiah_36_37_Sennacherib.htm.

²⁴ Psalm 103. 20. Cf. 'His mighty angels', 2 Thess. 1. 7, and, 'angels, which are greater in power and might', 2 Pet. 2. 11.

²⁵ We are not told what the image represented. It *may* have been of Nebuchadnezzar himself, but the text does not say this. Clearly, the important issue for us was not *the form* of the image, but that it served as an object of men's homage, Dan 3. 5, 10.

²⁶ Daniel 3. 14-13.

²⁷ Dan 3. 13.

²⁸ Cf. Prov. 16. 32; 25. 28.

²⁹ Matthew Henry, 'Commentary on the Whole Bible', on Dan. 3. 8-18.

³⁰ Dan 3. 15.

³¹ 2 Chron. 32. 15, 17.

³² Dan 3. 29.

³³ Dan 3. 28.

³⁴ Heb. 11. 27.

³⁵ Dan 3. 17-18.

³⁶ Acts 20. 32.

³⁷ Rom. 4. 21.

³⁸ Rom. 14. 4.

³⁹ Rom. 16. 25.

⁴⁰ 2 Cor. 9. 8.

⁴¹ Eph. 3. 20.

⁴² 2 Tim. 1. 12.

⁴³ Jude 24.

- 44 Luke 5. 12.
- 45 Heb. 11. 34.
- 46 Dan 3. 28.
- 47 Rom. 12. 1.
- 48 Their real (Hebrew) names, Dan. 1. 6-7.
- 49 The Aramaic word *těwah*.
- 50 Dan 3. 23-25.
 'A son of the gods' is the translation of the Aramaic expression דַּמְה לְבַר־אֱלֹהִין: דַּמְה (dāmēh lebar 'ēlāhīyn') in the ISV, ASV, ESV, EWB, JPS, LITV, MKJV, NASB, RSV, RV and YLT, as it is also the rendering in the Keil and Delitzsch *Commentary of the Old Testament*.
 Nebuchadnezzar was impressed with the fourth being's superhuman appearance, and speaks as a typical pagan when he likens the fourth person to 'a son of the gods'. In his later declaration, he says that the God of the three men had 'sent His angel', v. 28.
 'The rendering 'the Son of God' cannot stand: 'ēlōhim is, indeed, used with a singular force in Hebrew, but *the Aramaic 'ēlāhîn is always a true plural* (Dan_2:11; Dan_2:47, Dan_3:12; Dan_3:18, Dan_4:8; Dan_4:19; Dan_4:18, Dan_5:4; Dan_5:11; Dan_5:14; Dan_5:23), 'God' being in the Aram. of Ezra and Dan. denoted regularly by the sing. "ēlāh", S. R. Driver, *Daniel*, Cambridge Bible, page 44.
 'The insertion of the article "the", which is not in the Chaldee (the Aramaic, that is), gives a different impression from what the original would if literally interpreted ... *If the Redeemer appeared on this occasion, it cannot be explained why, in a case equally important and perilous, He did not appear to Daniel when cast into the lions' den (Dan. 6. 22); and as Daniel then attributed his deliverance to the intervention of an angel, there is every reason why the same explanation should be given of this passage*', Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Bible*, on Dan. 3. 25.
 Cf. the expression, 'sons of God', Gen. 6. 2, 4; Job 1. 6; 2. 1; 38. 7, which in each case clearly signifies angels.
- 51 They were 'loose', 'unbound', Dan 3. 35.
- 52 Dan 3. 27.
- 53 'Have no hurt', Dan 3. 25.
- 54 King Solomon, Prov. 6. 28.
- 55 Isa. 43. 2. 'The terms of extreme hardship suggest rigours and dangers imposed on captives enduring deportation. Fire is a more likely symbol of divine and enemy hostility than an experience chanced upon by those whose troubles are in the past ... "passing through waters" is the lot of those leaving home for exile', J Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, on Isa. 43. 1-7.
- 56 Dan 3. 20-22.
- 57 Dan 3. 29.
- 58 Dan 3. 25.
- 59 The same word is used in Dan. 6. 7, 12, 16 and 24 as was used in Dan. 3. 6, 11, 15, 20, 21 and 24.
- 60 G H Lang, *The Histories and prophecies of Daniel*, page 79.
- 61 Dan 5. 31.
- 62 Dan 6. 2-3.
- 63 Dan 6. 4.
- 64 Dan 6. 13.
- 65 Dan 6. 10: 'as he did previously'.
- 66 'Concerning the law of his God', Dan 6. 5.
- 67 Dan 6. 9.
- 68 C H Spurgeon, *Daniel facing the lion's den*, a sermon preached on 1 January 1874.
- 69 S. R. Driver, *Daniel*, Cambridge Bible, page 71.

⁷⁰ 'To be, or not to be', the opening phrase of a soliloquy uttered by Prince Hamlet in Shakespeare's play '*Hamlet*', Act 3, Scene 1.

⁷¹ Acts 3. 29.

⁷² Dan 6. 10.

⁷³ Luke 22. 39, 41.

⁷⁴ Dan 9. 2 with Jer. 29. 10-14.

⁷⁵ 1 Kings 8. 46-49.

⁷⁶ Psa. 55. 17; perhaps more accurately translated, 'Evening, and morning, and at noonday, will I *complain, and moan!*' This is the rendering given in RV, ASV, ESV, JPS etc. Recognise anyone? Sadly, the capacity of the human heart for complaining is astonishing.

⁷⁷ '*The Didache*', chapter 8. 'The Didache' (also known as 'The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles') was an early Christian treatise, dated by scholars to around the close of the first century AD.

⁷⁸ William Gurnall, '*The Christian in Complete Armour*', page 493.

⁷⁹ Phil. 4. 6; Col. 4. 2; 1 Tim. 2.1-2.

⁸⁰ Dan 3. 19.

⁸¹ An allusion to the cry 'Christians to the lions' in Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel '*Quo Vadis*'. Although whether such a cry ever actually rang through ancient Rome is rather doubtful. See <https://theconversation.com/mythbusting-ancient-rome-throwing-christians-to-the-lions-67365>. Dan 6. 16.

⁸² Dan 6. 17. There is no evidence that the king's signet had been used earlier to seal the written decree which occasioned Daniel's present predicament. After all, that document carried the king's own signature; contrast Esther 8. 8.

⁸³ In both cases, probably by a cord stretched across the stone and sealed at each end.

⁸⁴ Matt. 27. 60-66.

⁸⁵ Dan 6. 16.

⁸⁶ Dan 6. 20.

⁸⁷ Dan 6. 18; cf. Esther 6. 1.

⁸⁸ Harry Bell, '*Daniel*', page 94.

⁸⁹ Heb. 11. 33.

⁹⁰ Psa. 104. 21.

⁹¹ Dan 6. 24.

⁹² Dan 6. 27.

⁹³ Dan 6. 14. The same Aramaic word is used in verse 27 as it is in verse 14.

⁹⁴ Dan 6. 21-23.

⁹⁵ Luke 2. 13.

⁹⁶ Acts 12. 3.

⁹⁷ Acts 12. 21-23. 'The king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery', Flavius Josephus, '*Antiquities of the Jews*', Book 19, Chapter 8, Section 2.

⁹⁸ By sleeping soundly, Acts 12. 6.

⁹⁹ Luke 12. 4-5.

¹⁰⁰ Herod Agrippa I died in 44 AD.

¹⁰¹ Luke 22. 33.

¹⁰² Luke 22. 34, 57–61.

¹⁰³ Acts 12. 4-5.

¹⁰⁴ Acts 12. 6.

¹⁰⁵ Acts 12. 7.

¹⁰⁶ John Riddle, *'The Acts of the Apostles'*, page 193. See Acts 12. 7.

¹⁰⁷ Acts 12. 9, 11.

¹⁰⁸ Acts 12. 7.

¹⁰⁹ Acts 12. 23.

¹¹⁰ 1 Kings 19. 5, 7.

¹¹¹ John 21. 18.

¹¹² Luke 9. 32; 22. 45-46.

¹¹³ The angel needed to command Peter to get dressed because Peter didn't know that he was about to go out; he may also have needed the instruction because he didn't yet believe that he was really awake, Acts 12. 9, 11.

¹¹⁴ Personally, I suspect that there was only one of the four quads on duty at the time; two chained to Peter and two on sentry duty outside the door.

¹¹⁵ E L Bevir, *'The Christian Friend'*, volume 14, 1887, page 128.

The two earlier verses run (although I would seriously question the reference to 'Tabor' in the first verse; I am a Hermon fan):

*The glory of the kingdom spread
Over the Tabor's lofty head,
Lighting the mountain steeps;
And Jesu's robes were glistening white,
His face - the Sun in all its might,
And - Peter sleeps!*

*'Tis night, and in Gethsemane
A prostrate Form in agony,
With bitter crying, weeps;
The darkness deepens at His groan
(The darkest night this world hath known),
And - Peter sleeps!*

¹¹⁶ Acts 10. 17.

¹¹⁷ Acts 10. 3, 16-17.

¹¹⁸ Acts 12. 9.

¹¹⁹ Luke 18. 1-8..

¹²⁰ Acts 12. 11.

¹²¹ To afflict, to harm – *'κακῶσαι'*.

¹²² Acts 12. 1.

¹²³ Acts 12. 11-12. Mary, John Mark's mother, was the sister of Barnabas, Col. 4. 10.

¹²⁴ Acts 12. 17.

¹²⁵ Acts 12. 10, 13, 16.

¹²⁶ The word Luke uses for Rhoda's 'answering' the door (*ὑπακούω*) is applied to a doorkeeper's task; see Plato, *'Phaedo'*, section 59e.

¹²⁷ Cf. the explanation given by the bystanders in the courtyard to Peter, 'your speech betrays you', Matt. 26. 73.

- ¹²⁸ Acts 12. 13-14. Cf. Luke 24. 41 for another case of overwhelming joy.
- ¹²⁹ Mark 14. 66-70; the same word, 'παιδίσκη'.
- ¹³⁰ Acts 12. 11.
- ¹³¹ Acts 12. 15. Cf. the same Greek word in Acts 26. 24-25; 1 Cor. 14. 23.
- ¹³² Acts 12. 9.
- ¹³³ Source: Dr Jim Pratt, 'Prayer the Great Adventure', Sermon 4 at ...
http://www.gbmissionone.org/gbmissionone/2011_files/Section%201%20Final%20Mission%20One%20Plan%20Book%202011.pdf.
- ¹³⁴ Acts 12. 2.
- ¹³⁵ Acts 12. 16.
- ¹³⁶ Acts 12. 10.
- ¹³⁷ Acts 12. 17.
- ¹³⁸ Josh. 5. 14.
- ¹³⁹ Although unquestionably 'mighty in strength', Psa. 103. 20.
- ¹⁴⁰ Col. 1. 13.
- ¹⁴¹ Heb. 2.15.
- ¹⁴² 1 Thess. 1. 10.
- ¹⁴³ 1 John 4. 10.
- ¹⁴⁴ 1 John 1. 7.
- ¹⁴⁵ Angels are 'spirits', Heb. 1. 14.
- ¹⁴⁶ E.g. Gen. 18. 2, 16, 22; 19. 1.
- ¹⁴⁷ E.g. 1 Kings 19. 5.
- ¹⁴⁸ Gen. 19. 3.
- ¹⁴⁹ 'The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world', John 1. 29.
- ¹⁵⁰ Luke 20. 36; 'equal to angels' - ἰσαγγελοι. The Lord Jesus was *capable* of dying (unlike the fallen angels, Luke 20. 36), but He was not *subject* to death (unlike fallen man, Heb. 9. 27).
- ¹⁵¹ Rev. 5. 8-12. His wounds are memorials of death which no angel will (or can) ever carry.
- ¹⁵² Luke 1. 26, 31.
- ¹⁵³ Matt. 1. 21.
- ¹⁵⁴ Luke 2. 11.
- ¹⁵⁵ There was – and is – no more salvation to be found 'from angels' than there was – or is – salvation to be found 'for angels'. Their only 'deliverance' was into chains, pending judgement, 2 Pet. 2. 4; cf. Matt. 25. 41.
Jesus did not don the nature of angels, Heb. 2. 16 ... 'because He was not to be a Mediator for them, a Saviour unto them. Those of them who had sinned were left unto everlasting ruin; and those who retained their original righteousness needed no redemption', John Owen, 'A declaration of the glorious mystery of the person of Christ', in 'The Works of John Owen', Volume 1, page 86.
- ¹⁵⁶ Luke 19. 10; cf. Luke 9. 56.
- ¹⁵⁷ 1 Tim. 1. 15.

158 The full first verse reads:

I cannot tell why He whom angels worship
Should set His love upon the sons of men,
Or why, as Shepherd, He should seek the wanderers,
To bring them back, they know not how nor when.
But this I know, that He was born of Mary,
When Bethlehem's manger was His only home,
And that He lived at Nazareth and laboured,
And so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, has come.

William Fullerton (1857-1932) 'was a Baptist preacher, administrator and writer. He was born in Belfast, Ireland, and, as a young man, was influenced by the preaching of Charles Spurgeon, who became his friend and mentor'. Source: https://hymnary.org/person/Fullerton_WY.