

## Chapter 3

### The Miracle of Revelation

IF A message were to arrive from God today by the hand of an angel, it would be considered a miracle. In a sense it would be rightly so considered; it would be an act of God out of the common run of our experience. In another sense, the term might seem inapplicable. For evidently, in the abstract nature of things, it must be as natural for God to signify His mind, whether by an angel or by the power of the spirit, as for a man to do the same, by messenger or by letter. However, adopting the common idea that it would be a miracle, we may say that the next miracle after the fabrication of Eve from Adam's rib was the command delivered to Adam, as recorded thus (unless the command was delivered prior to Eve's appearance, which is immaterial): "The Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

We will not stay to discuss the wisdom of such an interdict or the need for it. Such a discussion would be foreign to the particular object of these chapters. Such a discussion, too, is unnecessary, in so far as the prohibition being proved a divine one (as it is in so many ways), it must needs have been needful and wise. We can even go further than this, and say that the prohibition is so self-evidently suited to the needs of the case as almost to exclude discussion. It exercised Adam in that subjection to the will of God which was the first law of his being. In the absence of that or other form of divine authority brought to bear, Adam would have been left to develop a life of creature enjoyment merely, which would have been foreign to God's object in creating him, and obstructive of the highest joy of which Adam's nature was capable. God formed him for His own glory and pleasure ([Rev. 4:11](#)), which are realised in man's intelligent recognition and affectionate submission: and in these also are realised the highest satisfaction and well-being possible to man. David speaks of "God my exceeding joy" ([Psa. 43:4](#)). This expresses the experience of man in his normal state. The present is not man's normal state. He has been banished into the darkness, so to speak, to take care of himself, in consequence of which he has, in his generations, sunk and degenerated till his original nobility is scarcely recognisable at all in the vast mass of the race. This view is of course at variance with the accepted notions of scientific circles. Nevertheless it is demonstrably true. Man has been formed for God; and until man is reconciled to God and in loving friendship with Him, man can never be happy. God is working out a plan for this reconciliation, and it will succeed in the long run with a sufficient number of the whole race to people the earth with man in the right relation to God.

But we must not digress. We return to Adam. In his innocent and "very good" state (sin having not yet entered into the world), the authority of God was brought to bear in expressed command. Have we not here an evidence that in the perfect state to which we are hoping to be introduced at the completion of Christ's work on earth, there will still be commandments to obey? Yea, this obedience will be the "exceeding joy" of the perfect state. In the workings of present love, do we not find its most congenial exercise and expression in complying with the wishes of those we love? How much more with the highest of all loves, and the highest of all powers to carry it out? It is written of the angels, to whom we hope to be made equal, "that they

do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word” ([Psa. 103:20](#)). In this we have a manifest sanction to the idea (reasonable on its own grounds), that obedience will be the law and delight of the perfect state, and that therefore, as in the case of Adam, though without the contingency involved in his case, the authority of the Creator will be brought to bear in the form of things commanded to be done, and perhaps, commanded not to be done. But this is digressing again.

The miracle (so called) consisted in God speaking. God can speak in various ways; not now including those ways that leave us to infer His voice, or that may be figuratively described as His voice, but speaking of those only that are actually His voice. Three ways are illustrated in the Scriptures:

1. He can speak directly so as to cause His voice to be concentrated on any point in the atmosphere and be audible to those in the neighbourhood of that point. Of this, we have an example when Jesus in the course of conversation with the Jews in the courts of the temple concerning the Father, said, “Father glorify thy name. Then *came there a voice from heaven*, saying, I have both glorified it and will glorify it again. The people, therefore, that stood by and heard, said that it thundered. Others said, An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes” ([John 12:28–30](#)). Another example may be found in the voice, proclaiming on the banks of the Jordan when Jesus was baptised, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” ([Matt. 3:17](#)). Men of the world, a generation ago, would have pronounced this impossible. Within recent years, their sceptical dogmatism has been rebuked by the discovery of laws by which sound can be transmitted great distances, so that, incredible as it may appear, the sound of the tramp of a fly’s feet on glass can be heard at a great distance. What though this require carefully-adjusted mechanical appliance, does it not show the existence of possibilities to which no man can set the bounds? What men can do by wires and funnels, adapting themselves to the laws of God’s power in its passive form, God can do with the naked power which is part of Himself, so to speak, so that when need be, He can cause His voice actually to be heard in any part of His universe. What a glorious contemplation does this open up to the mind concerning the ages to come. The cases in which He has so spoken have been few, and limited to those occasions that were suitable for such a signal honour and such a sublime occurrence. But what may we not hope for when the besotted generations of the wicked have for ever ceased upon earth, and the earth is the quiet and glorified habitation of His children, the meek of all generations for whom it is being prepared by all the vicissitudes it is now passing through? There is a depth of meaning which experience alone could qualify us to apprehend in the Apocalyptic description of this finality: “and there shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him; and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in the foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever” ([Rev. 22:3–5](#)).

2. Next, God can speak through men. That is, He can so lay His hand upon them by the Spirit and so control their thoughts and utterances as that the man’s voice, though, in a mechanical sense, the man’s voice, is yet actually the voice of God in so far as God uses the man’s voice to express God’s own ideas, without the man understanding or even knowing what he says. This is the case of the prophets, of whom it is testified that “they spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” ([2 Pet. 1:21](#)). “Prophecy,” the same authority informs us, “came not in old time *by the will of man.*” It was not, so to speak, secreted in the brain tissues of the men called prophets by the spontaneous working of impressions naturally derived, as in the case of a man’s own

thoughts or dreams; it was stamped there by the direct action of the Spirit of God, as in the case of one man mesmerically controlling the mind of another who may be subject to his influence (which is in fact the same operation on the human and infinitesimal scale). Having this origin, the prophets themselves were external to the word they spoke. What they said was no part of their own mentality, except mechanically, and for the time being. There was mixture but not amalgamation between the mind of the prophet and the Spirit of God upon him, so that when the vision had passed, and the prophecy had been uttered, a prophet was himself a student of his own utterances. This is what Peter informs us: “The prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, *searching what, or what manner of time the spirit of Christ which was in them did signify*, when it testified before-hand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow” ([1 Pet. 1:10–11](#)). As prophecy “came not by the will of man,” so the Spirit of God that brought the prophecy was a power which the prophet could not resist. This is illustrated in the case of Jeremiah, who felt inclined to repress the impulse on account of the scorn which the utterances of the prophecy brought upon him. Thus he writes: “Because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily, then I said, *I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name*’: but his word was in mine heart AS A BURNING FIRE SHUT UP IN MY BONES, and I was weary with forbearing; *I could not stay*” ([Jer. 20:8–9](#)). The same is illustrated in another Way in the history of Saul, of whom it is related, that when he went in hostile pursuit of David, what happened to three successive bands of messengers he had sent before him, happened to him also: “The Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on and prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah. And he stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say, Is Saul also among the prophets?” ([1 Sam. 19:23–24](#)). In this case, an angry man, starting out full of evil purpose against Samuel, who had given refuge to David, is taken a helpless captive by the power of the Spirit of God, and brought and laid at Samuel’s feet, in the most humiliating of conditions.

The action of the Spirit of God, operating through the infinitudes of space, is as quick as lightning. This is shown in the case of Isaiah’s visit to Hezekiah, when he was sick. Isaiah’s words were not comforting to the suffering king: “Thus saith the Lord, set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live.” Receiving this message, the king turns his face to the wall and gives himself over to a transport of grief and prayer, upon which Isaiah takes his departure. “And it came to pass, *afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court*, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah, the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, *I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold*, etc.” ([2 Kings 20:5](#)). Here is a fact perceived at the incomputable distance of the universe’s centre, and a message transmitted from that centre concerning the fact, in a minute or so of time. There are many other illustrations, but this is sufficiently striking by itself. It gives point to the declaration that Jehovah, by His Spirit, fills heaven and earth ([Jer. 23:23–24](#); [Psa. 139:7–8](#)), and that He is near to every one of us, and discerning of all our ways, even “the thoughts and intents of the heart” ([Acts 17:27](#); [Heb. 4:12](#)). As in the matter of voice, so in this matter of quickness of operation through space, the discoveries of modern investigation have silenced the foolish scepticism that would have said, “I do not believe it possible,” and have shown that there are higher things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in the common run of human philosophy. The rapid journey of light, the instantaneous flash of the electric current—(facts familiar but impossible to be conceived in their *modus operandi*)—help us to receive this highest of all facts wherein all facts have their root and power: that the Spirit of God is everywhere present, and that

in it, we are under the shadow of the Almighty and close to His ear, and that our lot and portion are a mere question of His will. The fact belongs to what most people call “miraculous;” but in truth, it is as much a fact as the sun or the harvest, or the beautiful fresh air. The only difference is, that these are seen: while the other, in the present state of things upon earth, is only to be intellectually discerned. By and by, when Christ at his return confers the precious gift of immortality, intellectual discernment will be supplemented by living perception and glorious experience which will bring with it a comfort and joy of being of which we may now only dream.

3. God can speak through the angels. This is not so direct as when He himself speaks; but it is more direct than when He speaks by the prophets. It is so much more direct that while in the case of the prophets, their messages are always prefaced by the intimation that “thus saith the Lord,” in the case of the angels, such a form rarely occurs; the message is almost always given without preface and in the first person as when the Almighty speaks directly. There are many illustrations of this. Let one or two suffice. When Israel, after their national settlement in the land of promise under Joshua, began at the first (after Joshua’s death) to go astray, “*an angel of the Lord* came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, *I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you into the land of which I swore unto your fathers, etc.*” ([Jud. 2:1](#)). Again, “The *angel of the Lord* appeared unto him (Moses) in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, and ... He said, *I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*” ([Ex. 3:1–6](#)). Again the angel which spake to Moses in Sinai ([Acts 7:38](#); and [Heb. 2:2](#)) always speaks in the first person without preface, e.g., “I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt” ([Ex. 20:2](#)).

In these cases, the angels speak as if they were God himself. What is the explanation of this? It is doubtless to be found here, that when the Spirit speaks by an angel, it speaks by an organism that is part of itself, so to speak. Man is of the earth, earthy; he is an animal organism, which, though subsisting in the Spirit, as all creation does, is not organically in unity and sympathy with it. He is, therefore, separate from the Spirit in all that constitutes his characteristics and sympathies as a living being. But angels are spirits ([Heb. 1:7](#)); that is, they are spiritual natures, spiritual bodies, organizations affinitised to all, that characterises the Spirit in its eternal subsistence of wisdom, goodness, and power. When, therefore, God, the Eternal sole universe-filling Spirit, speaks by them, He speaks by a vital apparatus that is, so to speak, part of himself. Considered in relation to the ineffable Father himself, they are separate from Him and ministrant to Him; but considered in relation to man to whom they are His representatives, they are One with Him, and therefore speak in His name, when He wills. By the one spirit dwelling in them all, He fills them all, and is therefore “all in (them) all.” They are in relation to man the One Majesty of heaven and earth in plural manifestation, though the distinction between the media and the power manifested through them is well marked, though not always. It is this form of things doubtless that explains the grammatical peculiarity of the Hebrew of which Dr. Thomas alone has suggested any reasonable solution, namely, that while in the description of the acts of God, the verb is always in the singular, the nominative is more frequently plural than singular. The universal rule of grammar that the verb must be of the same number with its nominative is disregarded in the matter in question. The name *Elohim* is plural; the verb is singular. It is as if we were to say, “Powers is agreed;” “Governments has made war;” “*Elohim* (powers) *yommer* (he said) let there be light.” We can understand this when we keep in view that while the one Eternal Father Spirit is the doer of all things, He performs His work by the multitudinous agency of the angels, who are His spirit incorporate, so to speak, in many glorious worshipping persons.

The plural agents (*Elohim*) do *his* (singular) pleasure; yet are He and they one by the Spirit, as Jesus prays it may be with his disciples (and what he prays for will be granted) “that they all may be one; I in them and thou, Father, in me, that they also may be one in us” ([John 17:21, 23](#)).

But we have strayed far from the garden of Eden while keeping close to the matters it presents to us for consideration. God spoke to Adam there. It must have been by one of the modes we have looked at. That is was not the first—the voice of the Almighty made audible as in the case of Christ—we may gather from the fact that the voice in the case was associated with a “presence” from which Adam hid himself. It was not the second (speaking through a man) for that the “presence” was not a prophet is self-evident. It was not by inspiration in himself that the voice addressed him: for the voice which spoke to him was a something external to himself, as we learn by the intimation that after disobedience, he “heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day,” and hearing the voice, “Adam and his wife hid themselves,” which would be inconceivable on the supposition of a subjective inspiration. There remains but the third—the angelic, which harmonises with all the features of the narrative, and is entirely consistent with the peculiarities of Divine discourse in the form already pointed out. It explains the local “presence” of the Lord God in the garden. It imparts a precise meaning to the form in which human creation is proposed: “Let *us* make man *in our image*” ([Gen. 1:26](#)); and it throws light on the otherwise dark record of verse [22](#) (chap. [3](#)) “And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as *one of us*, to know good and evil.” It is customary to understand this of “The Trinity”; but this is untenable on every ground. Even if the idea of a Trinity in the fountain head of Deity were not excluded by the testimony of the absolute unity and supremacy of the Father “out of whom are all things,” who is the head of Christ ([1 Cor. 11:3](#)), and to whom Christ himself is subordinate ([1 Cor. 15:28](#); [John 14:10](#)), the fact that the consulters of [Gen. 3:22](#) once “knew evil” is proof that they are not the Deity in the primary sense. Such a thing may be understood of the angels easily enough, for the angels hold their existence of and in the Father, and as the human journey to equality with them is through the path of probationary evil, it is easy to receive the idea that they also tasted evil before attaining to their present wonderful exaltation.

The idea of the angels visiting the garden of Eden places the Edenic chapter of the Divine work on earth on a par with all its subsequent recorded phases. We have the angels visiting Abraham ([Gen. 18](#)); Lot ([Gen. 19](#)); Moses ([Ex. 3](#)); Israel ([Josh. 2](#)); Gideon ([Jud. 6:11](#)); Manoah ([Jud. 13:3](#)), etc. etc., in all which cases their utterances are attributed directly to God as in [Gen. 3](#). The same harmony is to be seen in the prominence of the angelic service in the work of Christ, at his birth ([Luke 2:9–13](#)), his temptation ([Mark 1:13](#)), his crucifixion ([Luke 22:43](#)), his resurrection ([Matt. 28:2](#)), his ascension ([Acts 1:10](#)), and his coming again ([Matt. 16:27](#)). A final harmony is furnished in Christ’s allusion to the intimate relation of the angels to the day of his completed work on earth, “Ye shall see angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” ([John 1. 51](#)).

The appearance and speech of angelic visitors can only be called miraculous by those who have not been privileged to experience the fact—a description as yet applicable to the whole of the present generation. In its own sphere, it is as much a natural occurrence as anything else. The angels live as much as we do, and more; for we are only haft alive and rapidly tending to dissolution. They live a higher life than we do; for it is written, “Thou hast made man a little lower than the angels” ([Heb. 2:6–7](#)). They are already incorruptible, immortal, powerful, and glorious, which we only hope to become on attaining equality with them ([Luke 20:36](#); [1 Cor. 15:49](#)). But though thus immeasurably higher than human nature, they are not less real. They can be handled ([Gen. 32:24–32](#); [Hos. 12:4](#)) and seen ([2 Sam. 24:17](#)) and fed ([Gen. 18:8](#)) and talked

with ([Zech. 1:9](#)). They have powers of locomotion by the Spirit, which we have not in the present state: but this does not argue miraculous independence of the laws of nature according to the popular conception. It shows higher power. They have a command of nature which we have not; but this not through any separation from nature, but through an intimate relation to its powers by their affinity with the primary power in which and by which it exists and from which it has received its constitution. The angels being alive and powerful, their appearance is not a prodigy or a miracle in the vulgar sense, but merely a supremely interesting fact, not as yet within the experience of any now living, it is true, but a fact of the past as credibly testified as any astronomical phenomenon and much more decidedly confirmed. The recurrence of the fact is an imminent contingency; for the evidence is strong that Christ is near, and when he comes he is attended with a multitude of the angelic host.

To the naturalist, again we are in the region of myth in dealing with the subject of angels. His notion on the subject we may dismiss as a prejudice resulting from contracted knowledge. He will not accept what he has not seen for himself: consequently this branch of knowledge remains out of his range. Nay, he is not so consistent as this. He will admit that no man is able to see all facts for himself. He does, as matter of fact, receive much knowledge from secondary sources. He relies on the recorded experiments of other investigators in fields of nature which he has not time to work for himself, and his faith in the experiments is not weakened by the fact that the experimenter may be dead. (Faraday, to wit.) He puts much faith in class books, though the authors may be in their graves. He accepts history enacted ages before he was born, and relies on the evidence of long-dead witnesses in the working out of conclusions as to eclipses or other astronomical occurrences. Why, then, is he so shy of the testimony to the work and nature of angels? The evidence as evidence cannot be touched. It is the nature of the thing given evidence to that excites his invincible intellectual repugnance. Angels he places with mermaids and houris and fairies. There is not the least parallel whatever. These are the mere fictions of fancy, unsupported by any kind of evidence—unconnected with anything serious or rational under the sun. But angels are part of the Bible, part of Jewish history—part of a great work which beginning in Judea in the first century, has already revolutionised the world. They cannot be put aside. A man may exclude them from his individual recognition by isolating himself from the facts that establish their existence; but the facts—great and serious and noble—remain to be seen by every earnest mind in diligent quest for truth irrespective of the form it may take.

There is nothing in the idea of angels in the abstract calculated to excite incredulity or aversion. On the contrary, it is in harmony with reasonable presumption, suggested by the contemplation of the universe. It is reasonable to assume as a matter of scientific induction that there are higher forms of life than we now see upon the earth. The universe is too vast and grand to allow of the supposition that it exists only for such a poor abortive creature as dying man. An immortal organism is not out of the range of even scientific conception. Prof. T. H. Huxley himself, in his last work, points out that there is no reason in the abstract why there should not be such an equipoise between the processes of waste and reparation in the animal tissues as that an organism thus perfectly balanced should go on working for ever. What modern science thus dimly gropes after as a pleasing but useless speculation, is seriously revealed by the Bible. There are higher things than man, to whom God, by Christ, has given man the hope of becoming equal. They have often been seen upon earth and will be seen again. Their first recorded appearance was in the garden of Eden—an event which the dullness of modern thought compels us to speak of as a miracle. There we must leave them for the present, hoping to have to make their closer acquaintance in future chapters.