

LESSONS ON PREDESTINATION #77

"The Ascension: The Confirmation of the Angels"
(Scriptures from NKJV)

Ephesians 3:9-11:

And to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

INTRODUCTION: In our lesson last week, we gave a review of the role of angels in the eternal purpose of God to elevate a Man, namely the God-Man, to the position of superiority over the angels, and so rule as a humble servant as governor of the moral universe. The ascension of Christ to the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on High is the fulfillment of that purpose.

We now wish to address the question as to when, in the history of redemption, were the holy angels confirmed in eternal life? Angels are moral beings, as well as men. Since man was given a probationary test of obedience, it would seem to require that the angels would likewise be placed in a probationary period. Logic would seem to require that if God created the angels, He would explain to them the reason for their creation along with their duties to Him. It would be illogical for God to create them as moral beings and not explain to them the reason for their existence. Since we are in an area where not every thing is known, but hints are given, let us assume there is a close parallel between what we know about man's probation and apply that to the angels.

A. THE PROBATION OF MEN AND ANGELS.

1. Possibility Thinking: Lets engage in some "possibility" thinking by asking "What if there had been no fall, either of angels or men?"

2. Objection: An objection immediately comes to mind: "That's not possible because God has ordained the fall!"

3. Yes, that is true, but although God had determined the fall, He is not culpable or responsible for the fall. By that I mean that God did not create two types of angels; one type with a will to sin, and the other type with a will to obey. If God had done so, He would have created two orders or types of angels - holy angels and unholy devils. Then there would have been no need for an election of some angels unto holiness in that they were created and confirmed in holiness in their creation.

4. NOTE: Election only makes sense when you are making a choice among one class of creatures, all of which have identical capabilities. Compare the election of men. All were equally lost, none more so lost than others.

5. Since men and angels were capable of falling, and did so, they being created holy and upright, were capable of not falling. Thus our question: what would be the case if they had not fallen?

B. THE COVENANT OF WORKS OR OBEDIENCE.

1. We know that man was created upright, holy and good. Genesis 2:7 says, ***"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."***

2. After breathing life into Adam, the next few verses give a description of the garden in which he was placed. Genesis 2:8-9; 15-17, ***"The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."***

"Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'"

3. The garden supplied food for man, primarily in the form of fruit from the trees. There were two special trees known as the ***"tree of life"*** and the ***"tree of the knowledge of good and evil."*** They were said to be located in the ***"midst of the garden"*** meaning they were the two most important trees and easy to locate.

4. NOTE: Thus Adam had life but he did not yet have eternal life. Why? Because eternal life cannot be lost or else it was never eternal. Adam would receive eternal life by eating the fruit of this tree, and he was not forbidden to eat of the tree in his unfallen state. But the one tree, known as the ***"tree of the knowledge of good and evil,"*** was forbidden to be eaten by Adam with death being the penalty for disobedience.

5. This sets up a period of testing for Adam which we can call a probationary period. Theologians call this the "Covenant of Works." I do not like that term, in that it suggests

that Adam could earn eternal life. It has been suggested that a better term should be a "Covenant of Continuance." Why is this better? Because all Adam had to do was to maintain or continue in the state of life he already had for an unspecified period of time, at which he would be confirmed in eternal life which could not be lost.

C. THE TREE OF LIFE.

1. Consider that man in his unfallen state has access to eat of this tree. It was not until after his fall that he was forbidden to eat of the tree. This is seen in Genesis 3:22-24, ***"Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'— therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life."*** Notice that the eating of the tree would enable man to "live forever," thus eternally. But for man's protection, God drove man out of the garden and placed cherubim (angels) with a flaming sword to prevent man from eating lest he be confirmed in a state of eternal death from which there could be no recovery. Since there were no angels present to prevent man from eating of the tree in his unfallen state, then he must have been able to eat of it while he was unfallen.

2. An observation now arises. Why would Adam not eat of this tree first? Even if he was going to eat of the forbidden tree, would it not be a wise thing to eat of the tree of life first? In that way, he would be confirmed in eternal life and never be lost!

3. I believe the answer is simple but speculative in that the Bible does not give an answer. Lets consider the issues involved:

First: Adam is on a probationary period at the end of which he will be confirmed in eternal life if he has remained faithful to the conditions of the covenant.

Second: The eating of the tree will bring about his confirmation in eternal life.

Third: He has permission to eat of the tree. There is nothing to indicate that God warned him against eating of it.

Fourth: Question restated. Why had he not done so?

a. I suggest to you that the tree had not yet born its fruit! If God's purpose is to impose upon Adam a probationary period whereby upon the completion of which Adam and Eve may eat of the tree of life, this would be a logical and most excellent way to accomplish that. Perhaps the tree was already blossoming indicating that the fruit was soon

to appear, but as of yet no fruit had yet appeared. This would have prevented Adam from eating the fruit until the probationary period was completed.

b. Consider there was fruit on the rest of the trees, and especially that one tree of which they were forbidden to eat. Its fruit was luscious fruit, beautiful fruit which promised to produce a superior wisdom over which Adam presently possessed: But it was the fruit of which would bring about his downfall.

D. CHRIST, THE TREE OF LIFE.

1. The Bible is a simple book. What man loses in Genesis, is restored in Revelation. It is like "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Restored." All of the material in the middle of the Bible is how man regains what he lost. It is the story of Jesus Christ. In Revelation 22:1-5 we read, ***"And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 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. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever."***

2. Notice there is a tree of life in heaven, the native country of angels, just like there was on earth in the native life of men. In both cases that tree represents the life that comes from Christ. The "tree of life" appears three times in Revelation 22 (vs. 2, 14, 19) where the new paradise is described. In the New Testament the word translated "tree" (Greek "xulon") is used of the cross (cf. Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; Galatians 3:13; I Peter 2:24). It is through Christ's death on the "tree" that mankind may have eternal life. He ***"bore our sins in His own body on the tree."*** (I Peter 2:24).

Perhaps a brief reading of Revelation 2:7 and Revelation 22:14 will help our minds to see where the tree is located ***"in the midst of the Paradise of God."*** Revelation 2:7 reads, ***"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."*** And Revelation 22:14 reads, ***"Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city."*** The tree clearly represents Christ in the midst of His people as seen throughout the book of Revelation. The tree represents the full and

complete reception and realization of the life that is in Christ Jesus. But remember that Christ as the God-Man doesn't become the tree of life until after His ascension. Cf. Hebrews 5:7-9 - ***"Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him."*** Remember, the Man, the second Adam, is also under a trial or probationary period. He must complete all of the trials assigned for Him by the Father. He must be made perfect and complete in through the things which He suffered. It is then He becomes the author of salvation and eternal life.

E. CHRIST AND THE ANGELS.

1. While that is the case of man, what about the holy angels? When were they confirmed? In their election? At the time of Satan's fall and rebellion? Or at the time of the ascension?

2. Consideration: Consider when they were created, they must have been placed under a time of probation. They were capable of falling, because some did. Think of the trial to which they were exposed when their head, Satan himself, rebelled and tried to lure them into his rebellion. As we have seen, all of the angels were under a covenant of obedience to remain faithful in humbling themselves and serving the creature man out of which would come the God-Man. This corresponded to the tree of knowledge of good and evil comprising Adam's test.

3. Now how long was the probationary period to last? We know that the holy angels are now confirmed in eternal life and cannot lose it. Our question is, when did their confirmation occur?

4. I submit that throughout the Old Testament age, the "elect" angels were holy, righteous, and obedient, but not immutably so; they could lose it! Further, I submit that it was at the time of the ascension of Christ, when He filled the office of the firstborn of every creature, the very office which Satan vacated, that the confirmation of the angels occurred.

5. Colossians 1:15-20 declares that it is the Father's will that Christ have the pre-eminence in all things - ***"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or***

powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. Through His death on the cross, God has reconciled all things, not only on earth, but also in heaven. Who could those in heaven be but the angels? In verse 16, they are called the ***"thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers."*** Christ is not manifested as receiving pre-eminence or dominion until He is rewarded for His obedience, and this takes place at His ascension. Thus the angels, as well as men, benefitted from the ascension of Christ to glory. It was then that Christ became the Head, not just of the church, but of the angels as well. Colossians 2:9, 10 says, ***"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power."***

6. They had remained steadfast from the day that God told Satan that the One from the Seed of the woman would bruise his head. They had followed the battle between the two kingdoms throughout the Old Testament and through the New, and remained steadfast. They watched as He was humbled in His birth. Could they really believe this little helpless creature could destroy Lucifer's kingdom and become the King of Glory? They watched Him live a lowly life like that of a carpenter. Then they had to watch as He suffers the agonies of the garden and the cross. Would they still believe that He could ascend to the place of the Highest, or would they depart from Him in disappointment like the multitudes did? No, no, they see Him rise from the grave and rewarded for His obedience by being promoted to the right hand of the Majesty on High! They have remained holy, just, and upright. Now they are rewarded by being confirmed in that state of eternal life which can never be lost! Christ is now All in All! Glory!

F. JONATHAN EDWARDS' VIEWS OF THE TOPIC.

I am deeply indebted to Jonathan Edwards for his insights into the topic of angels. He lists several reasons for believing the confirmation of the angels occurred at the ascension. After establishing a time of probation for the angels, He says:

But when their time of probation was at an end, and they had the reward of certain confirmation by having eternal life absolutely made certain to them, is in some degree uncertain. However, there are many things that make it look exceedingly probably to me, that whenever this was done, it was through the Son of God, that he was the immediate dispenser of this reward, and that they received it of the Father through him.

We have shown before that it was in contempt of the Son of God that those

of them that fell, rebelled; it was because they would not have one in the human nature to rule over them. How congruous, therefore, is it, that those that stood should be dependent on him for their reward of confirmation in contempt of whom the others had rebelled. It was congruous that Christ, who was despised and rejected by a great number of the angels, should become the foundation upon which the rest should be built for eternal life, Psalm 118:22. **"The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner."**

That God should thus honor his Son in the sight of the angels, who had been thus contemned by the angels that fell in their sight, this makes it seem probable to me that the time of their confirmation was when Jesus Christ ascended into heaven.

He then lists four reasons for believing that the confirmation occurred at Christ's ascension.

1. *First.* It was *Jesus Christ in the human nature*, that was despised and rejected by the rebelling angels. It was congruous therefore, that it should be *Jesus Christ in the human nature* that should confirm them that stood.

2. *Secondly.* It was also congruous that their confirmation should be deferred till that time, that before they were confirmed they might have a thorough trial of their obedience in that particular, wherein the rebelling angels were guilty, *viz.* In their submission to Jesus Christ in the human nature. It was congruous therefore that their confirmation should be deferred till they had actually submitted to Christ in man's nature as their King, as they had opportunity to do when Christ in man's nature ascended into heaven.

3. *Thirdly.* It seems very congruous that this should be reserved to be part of Christ's exaltation. We often read of Christ's being set over the angels when he ascended, and set at the right hand of God, and of his being then made head of all principality and power, that then all things were put under his feet, that then God the Father said, **"Let all the angels of God worship him."** It was very congruous that Christ should have this honor immediately after such great humiliation and sufferings.

4. *Fourthly.* It was fit that the angels should be confirmed after they had seen Christ in the flesh, for this was the greatest trial of the angels' obedience that ever was. If the other angels rebelled only at its being *foretold* that such an one in man's nature should rule over them, if that was so great a trial that so many mighty angels fell in it; how great a trial was it when they *actually saw* a poor, obscure, despised, afflicted man, one whom they had just seen so mocked, and spit upon, and crucified, and put to death like a vile malefactor! This was a great trial to those thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers, those mighty, glorious, and exalted spirits, whether or no they would submit to such an one for their sovereign Lord and King.

It was also very fit that God would honor the day of the ascension and glorious exaltation of his Son, which was a day of such joy to Christ, with joining with it such an occasion of joy to the angels as the reception of their reward of eternal life: that when Christ rejoiced, who had lately endured so much sorrow, the heavenly hosts might rejoice with him. (Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 2, Section XI, p. 612).

G. THE CONFIRMATION OF THE SAINTS.

1. Question: When are the saints confirmed in eternal life? Time will require us to be brief on this question.

2. Let it be understood that the Bible clearly teaches that man by nature is fallen and lies in a state of condemnation. He is no longer in a state of probation as was the first Adam. Man's religion would have us believe that even though man is sinful, he is still under a period of probation, and that by his works of obedience he may yet be rewarded with eternal life at the final judgment if he has obeyed enough to so deserve.

3. God's salvation sets forth that lost sinners are confirmed in eternal life when they hear the Good News of the Gospel and believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The Son of God affirms this in John 5:24 which says, **"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."**

4. Notice that prior to faith, the sinner is residing in a state of spiritual death. Notice also that at the point of faith in Christ, he passes from a state of death into a state of everlasting life. Notice again that at that point, he is confirmed in eternal life and can never fall back into a state of spiritual judgment or death. Eternal life, once possessed, can never cease. Yes, Revelation 2:7 says he must overcome. **"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."** But that overcoming is not the price paid to obtain life, but the evidence or manifestation that he has it. John confirms this in I John 3:9, 10, **"Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother."**

5. If we have it, we are as certain of it as we shall ever be!