

□ Sunday morning, 6:00—I awakened to the last day of our family vacation. Every year we look forward to our time at the New Jersey shore to spend a week at Harvey Cedars Bible Conference on Long Beach Island—meals provided, daily Bible teaching, time with friends, things for the whole family to do, wholesome and relaxed atmosphere, sun and fun on the beach. But the week’s stay was coming to its inevitable close. After the 11:00 a.m. worship service our family would head home with all the other revelers to return to the rigors of real life.

I decided to take the half-mile stroll from our restored Victorian hotel to the ocean. The unseasonably crisp day, especially for early August, reigned spectacular with its brilliant sun and bright blue, cloudless sky—a banquet for the senses.

As I walked, I took it all in, enjoying sweet communion with my God. My heart swelled with awe and wonder. My thoughts filled with praise, at various points compelled to adoration, driven to confession, overflowing with thanksgiving. I reached the beach and stepped over the crest of the sand dunes. That’s when the sensory stimulation reached overload. The vast ocean spread out before me, the radiance of the sun magnified in reflection off its surface.

■ Spiritual Warfare

Sometimes the ocean can be restless, even violent, its waters gray and ominous, the surf raging with fury. Not today. The ocean rested as placid as I had ever seen it, the waters tranquil, generating waves no greater than the bay on the west side of the barrier island on which we stayed. A couple of beachcombers preceded my arrival, but their presence only contributed to the serenity of the scene. I gave glory to God as the Maker of the sea and all that is in it. To look upon it all, anyone would think there was not a care or worry in the world.

Appearances can be deceiving.

SEEING THE UNSEEN

A biblical worldview informs us that there is more to life than meets the eye. Contrary to a naturalistic worldview that denies the supernatural and insists on reality being limited to sensory data, a vast realm of the unseen exists, a spiritual realm, where things are happening right now as you read these words. This realm is not some sort of science fiction parallel universe but an actual part of God's created order. We acknowledge the existence of the unseen realm every time we take the words of the Nicene Creed to our lips: "one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible."

Occupying and active in this realm are angelic beings, involved in doings affecting the world in which we live, all by God's design, operating at God's appointment. Angels are creatures, not in the sense of something grotesque or menacing, but creatures as in created beings. God created two types of beings, angelic and human, both possessing

Seeing the Unseen ■

personhood and character. Angels are spiritual, unseen in their ordinary state. They are neither eternal nor all-powerful, but they are powerful and capable of activity beyond human capacity. They are everywhere present, but not in the manner of the omnipresence of the God who fills all in all, from whose presence we cannot escape (Ps. 139). Rather, they are everywhere present because of their vast number. We are told of angelic hosts, akin to starry hosts or hosts of fish that teem under the sea. In the ultimate megachurch, myriads upon myriads of angels gather in worshipful assembly with all the human saints in heavenly glory to exalt the Creator who alone is to be forever praised.¹

Scripture suggests diversity and strata within these angelic ranks. Cherubim (singular, cherub) are stationed at Eden's entrance, flaming swords in hand. Seraphim form an angelic choir exalting God in the splendor of his holiness. Michael, one of two named angels (the other being Gabriel), carries the designation of "archangel" (Jude 9). The book of Daniel affords an extraordinary glimpse of the unseen world in which Michael is said to be in battle and one sent in response to Daniel's prayers (Dan. 10:10–21).

We're not told a lot in the Bible about the unseen realm, but sometimes the curtain is parted and we are given a glimpse, from which we draw our conclusions about angels and their purpose. Angels are depicted as messengers, guardians, warriors—all at the bidding of God, the Lord of hosts. Gabriel announced to Mary that she would be with child by the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament holds numerous examples of angels bringing

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messages of God in anticipation of his purpose and plans. The psalmist refers to angels' role in exercising the care of God and prompts us to wonder about the unseen reality surrounding us:

For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.
(Ps. 91:11–12)

Hebrews 1 makes considerable mention of angels, closing with reference to their divinely appointed role as “ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation” (Heb. 1:14).

But not all angels seek to minister. The Bible describes other angels, ones who rebelled against God (Jude 6). These are called fallen angels and stand in contrast to those kept by God from rebelling, called “elect angels” (1 Tim. 5:21) or “holy angels” (Mark 8:38). Contrary to the elect angels who do God's bidding, the fallen angels, called demons, work to thwart God's purposes. Just as with any angels, demons are created beings, many in number, mighty in power, but neither omnipresent nor omnipotent nor omniscient as is God alone. And while the fallen angels in their rebellion do revel in sin and transgression of God's revealed will, they cannot help but serve the overarching plan of God that brings all things to serve his purpose in keeping with his sovereign providence governing all creatures and all contingencies (Eph. 1:11).

From this unseen realm comes our unseen adversary.