

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 19

Halifax, 25 November 2007

Q. 19 What is God's providence toward the angels?

A. God by His providence permitted some of the angels, wilfully and irrecoverably, to fall into sin and damnation, limiting and ordering that, and all their sins, to His own glory; and established the rest in holiness and happiness; employing them all, at His pleasure, in the administrations of His power, mercy, and justice.

Introduction:

A couple of weeks ago, we looked at the creation of angels.

- I showed you that scripture declares plainly that angels are indeed created by God.
 - There are certain philosophies of men that see angels as emanations of God (demigods you might call them)—a partial deity...or a piece of deity.
 - but to hold such a view is to greatly insult the majesty of God who is far, far, above all things created!
 - The Bible always maintains a very sharp distinction between the creature and the Creator...
 - It is the wicked tendency of man in his fallen condition to reduce God...
 - to diminish the gap between the creature and the Creator...
 - to think of God as more like us than like Himself.
 - That is idolatry!
 - We must never think of the angels as gods.
 - We must always think of God as glorious.

After looking at the fact that angels are created by God, we looked at the purpose for which they were created.

- And I showed you that they were created to execute God's commandments and to praise His name.
 - They are in a most privileged place,
 - always beholding the glory of the LORD and ever occupied in His service.
 - You will do well to follow their example.
- Tonight we will take up our study of angels once again...

- But this time we will look at God’s providence concerning angels—
 - In other words,
 - What does God (who has planned everything) do with them?
 - How does He use them within His purpose?

Our reading is from Revelation 12.

- In this chapter, we read about fallen angels as well as holy angels, and we see how God uses both to accomplish His purpose.
- READ> Rev. 12.

As our focus tonight is on angels and how God uses them for His purposes,

- I want to use this chapter as an illustration of that tonight...
 - Actually, first, I want to use this chapter as a springboard to launch into a discussion about the two different kinds of angels...
 - And then I want to use it as an illustration to show you how God uses the angels—even the wicked angels (or the devils)—to carry out His purposes.

I. First of all, then, notice that there are two opposing camps of angels mentioned in Revelation 12.

- You can see these two camps named in verse 7.

A. First, there is Michael, the archangel, and his angels...

1. Michael is called an archangel in Jude 1:9, so it is not surprising to see him here in charge of a company of angels.
 - a. He is described in Daniel 12:1 as
 - “the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people,”
 - that is, the people of the LORD.
 - He is therefore fighting at the Lord’s command, in obedience to the Lord’s will.

TRANS> Let’s explore this a little more deeply...

- b. In Jude 1:9, we are told that when he contended with Satan about the body of Moses,
 - he did not bring a railing accusation against Satan because it was not his place to do so...
 - Instead, he said, “the Lord rebuke you.”

- This shows that he was not one to take matters into his own hands, but one who submitted to the LORD.
 - If God had a purpose for Satan, it was not for Michael to destroy him—not until the Lord’s time.
 - This is a very important principle...
 - In Jude, we are told that Michael did not fight Satan, but here in Revelation 12, he does...
 - Unlike Satan, Michael would not destroy Satan (or try to destroy him) until told to do so...
 - He was not like those who blow up abortion clinics in the name of the LORD when God has not authorised them do this...
 - We should say, “The Lord rebuke you” and warn them of their deeds,
 - but we must wait for Him to act.
2. From this you can see that Michael and his angels are among those angels the catechism speaks about who are “established in holiness and happiness.”
- a. Michael stands in sharp contrast with those angels that,
- according to Jude 1:6,
 - “did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode”
 - and so
 - “are reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgement of the great day.”
- 1) This informs us that even though all the angels were created in holiness and righteousness,
- some of them continued in holiness and some of them rebelled.
 - Some of them continued in their proper abode under the authority of the Lord, and some them left their proper abode.
- a) Satan and his angels are the ones, of course, who rebelled.
- The reference to Satan taking out a third of the stars with him in Rev 12:4, may be a reference to his fall with other reprobate angels...
- b) But Jude 1:6 also indicates that some of the angels did continue in their proper abode...
- As I explained to you before, angels are not a race as we are...

- We are all of our father Adam so that when he fell, we all fell with him...
 - But angels, who do not marry, are separate creations—
 - and as such, some of them fell and some of them did not fall.
- 2) That the angels who did not fall are (as the catechism says) “established in holiness and happiness,”
- is indicated by the fact that they are called “the elect angels” in 1 Timothy 5:21.
 - Calling them “elect” suggests that they are now confirmed in salvation.
- b. As an elect angel, Michael is among those who stand up for the Lord’s people instead of trying to destroy us as Satan does...
- 1) He is among those angels we looked at in Psalm 103 a couple of weeks ago who are described by the psalmist as:
- “you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word...all you His hosts, you ministers of His, who do His pleasure.”
 - They are the ones who are such an example of obedient service that our Lord Jesus tells us to pray that we will obey God’s will on earth even as the angels do in heaven!
- 2) Our catechism says that they are employed in the administrations of God’s power, mercy, and justice...
- a) That is just what we see in Revelation 12:7-8...
- Michael is standing up there for the people of God against Satan!
 - He is wielding God’s power...
 - God’s power operates through him to cast Satan out of heaven.
 - This is an act of God’s mercy to prepare heaven for us, and act of His justice to remove Satan from His presence...
 - But Michael and his angels are the ones who have the privilege of doing the Lord’s work here.
- b) We find the angels exercising God’s power, mercy and justice all through the world history...
- (i) As soon as Adam and Eve transgressed,
- angels were sent to guard the way to the tree of life so that no one could go and partake of it.
- (ii) When Moses was given the Law,

- Stephen tells us in Acts 7:53 that he received the law by the direction of angels.
- (iii) When Jesus rose from the dead, it was the angels who came to move the stone...
- and it was they who were the first heralds of his resurrection.
- (iv) When Jesus comes at the end of the age, all the holy angels will be with Him...
- They will be the ones who will separate the wheat from the tares at that time,
 - and they will be the ones who cast the dead branches into the fire of God's wrath.
- (v) When Jesus spoke of His loving protection of little children, He warned:
- Mt 18:10: Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.
 - The idea seems to be that if you cause a child to stumble, God will sic His angels on you...
 - They will execute His chastisement upon you.
- (vi) They are frequently referred to as those who fight the Lord's battles...and are even called His chariots...
- Psalm 68:17 says: The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of thousands; the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the Holy Place.
 - And Psalm 18:10 describes the LORD as riding upon a cherub to execute His judgments...
- (vii) Then there are their acts of mercy...
- They are attributed with feeding Israel in the wilderness and with comforting Jesus in the wilderness...
 - And in Luke 22:43, an angel appeared to him and strengthened Him when all His disciples fell asleep.

TRANS> All these are acts of God performed by angels.

- c) Passages like Psalm 91 make it clear that we don't know the thousandth part of the work they do...
- It says:

- Psalm 91:9-12: Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.
- So here is Michael and other angels with him in Revelation 12:7-8 exercising the power of the LORD to cast Satan out of heaven at the appointed time...

B. Now let us take a look at the angel on the other side...the ones Michael opposes...

1. He is described in detail in verse 9:

- So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.
- You see all the names by which he is called here...
 - a. He is the great dragon—
 - This name represents him as the one who is always trying to destroy the people of God...
 - In Ezekiel, he is compared with Pharaoh who is called the great dragon that lies in the midst of the rivers...
 - Pharaoh is a type of Satan because he tried to keep God's people from worshipping Him...
 - b. He is the serpent of old—
 - This is a reference to his presence in the garden when, through his craftiness, he tempted Eve and then used her to tempt Adam so that the human race would fall.
 - We are told that he was more subtle than any beast of the field...
 - Jesus says, "He was a murderer from the beginning and abode not in the truth" and that he was a liar and the father of it...
 - He began in the truth, but he did not abide in the truth...
 - This is a reference to his falling away and then leading us away—as the founder of the deceptions that are so prevalent in the world today...
 - The serpent is the father of all lies—the originator of lies.
 - You see how the verse goes on to say that He is the one who deceives the whole world!
 - c. He is called the devil...

- The word devil is *diabolov* in Greek and means slanderer...
 - This bears out in Revelation 12:10 where he is described as
 - “the accuser of the brethren who accused them before God day and night.”
 - There is a picture of this in Job when the LORD asked Satan about Job and Satan accuses Job of serving God only for what he could get...
 - He says, “let me afflict him and he will curse you...”
 - He accuses him—his desire is that we all be found guilty and apostate before the LORD.
 - He delights in our sin...
- d. Finally, he is called Satan (*satanav*)
 - This name means “adversary.”
 - He is the arch enemy of God, of His Christ, and of His saints...
 - ever trying to move us into apostasy through temptation and persecution.
 - In Job we see that he is given the ability to afflict Job with bereavement, attacks from enemies, destructive storms, and at last with bodily affliction.

TRANS> So you see these two great armies—

- the holy angels and the fallen angels,
- the elect angels and the devils.

But now I want to illustrate to you something truly remarkable from Revelation 12—

- I want to show you that God uses Satan—everything he does—as an integral part of His holy plan...
 - Remember that God’s decrees include whatsoever comes to pass...
 - Ephesians 1:11 says that the LORD “works all things after the counsel of His will.”
 - That includes the most diabolical acts of Satan...
 - Not that the LORD commands him to do these things...
 - But it is that the LORD decreed that Satan should do what he does...
- In nothing is this principle brought out so clearly as in the crucifixion of our LORD.
 - In Acts 2:22-24, Peter says:
 - Acts 2:22-24: “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the

determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.”

- Certainly it was the will of Satan, of the chief priests, and of Herod that Jesus should be crucified,
 - but it was also the will of God...
 - It was not the command of God, mind you, but it was the purpose and plan of God.
 - He did not command anyone to crucify His Son...
 - His commands forbade it...
 - but He purposed that it should be done by the hand of wicked men.
 - He did it for His own glory.
- In Acts 4:27, this same truth is repeated again...
 - Acts 4:27-28: For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.
 - We can understand and accept that the crucifixion of Jesus was for God’s own glory because we understand why He did it...
 - But we must not suppose that anything else that happens—including the fall of Satan in the beginning and the subsequent fall of man...
 - was for any other purpose than God’s glory—
 - and was in any way a deviation of His decree or plan...
 - contrary to His command?
 - yes indeed!—
 - But also according to His determined purpose and foreknowledge...
 - As we saw before when we studied about the decrees of God,
 - Ro 11:36 For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

Okay then,

II. Let’s look at our illustration of how God uses Satan for His glory in Rev. 12.

- A. The chapter opens with the church portrayed as a woman clothed with the Sun (representing light), with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of 12 stars probably representing the 12 tribes of Israel.

1. Please understand that by saying she represents the church, I refer to the people of God in all ages—
 - From Adam until the end...not just in the New Testament...
 - a. The Church is often portrayed in the Old Testament as a pregnant woman...
 - as here in verse 2:
 - “Then, being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.”
 - b. The reason for this portrayal of a woman in travail is because of the ancient promise to Eve...
 - That from her a Son would be born who would crush the serpent’s head...
 - All through the ages until Christ came,
 - the people of God were waiting for the promised Son who would come.
 - All through the ages, they were pregnant with God’s promised salvation...
 - labouring and waiting...
 - often seemingly barren, like Sarah,
 - but holding on to the promise of God until Messiah should come, bringing salvation with Him...
 - till He would come to crush the head of the ancient serpent.
2. And you see that in verse 3 (Rev 12:3), the dragon appears—
 - a. We have already seen that this dragon is identified in verse 9 as the serpent of old, Satan and the devil who deceives the whole world...
 - He is the one that led the whole human race into sin.
 - b. He is presented here as a very imposing figure!
 - He is described as a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems on his heads...
 - The seven heads show that he seems to be everywhere—and make him very hard to slay...
 - Like a cat who has nine lives...
 - The ten horns show that he is strong, for horns are the symbol of strength,
 - and the seven diadems are crowns and show that he rules everywhere...

- after all, he is called the ruler of this world, and in verse 9 he is said to deceive the whole world.

3. Now look at what this dreadful creature is doing to the church!

a. He is standing before her with but one goal—(look at verse 4)...

- that he might destroy the child that she bears!
 - All through the Old Testament, he tried to destroy this child by destroying the woman...
 - He was the ruler of Egypt and the ruler of Assyria and the ruler of Babylon and the inspiration behind Antiochus Epiphanes,
 - the Greek ruler who tried to secularise Israel.

1) He tried to destroy the Christ as soon as He was born...

a) It was his continual goal to destroy Him...

- Through Herod's murderous efforts...
 - and through the temptation in the wilderness where he employed the same tactics he used with Adam...
 - and at last at the cross where victory seemed certain to Satan—it was the hour of the power of darkness.

b) John passes over these details because his focus is elsewhere...

- He is not here setting forth Christ and his work...
 - He is rather presenting Satan's attacks on the church...
- But the child's identity is unmistakable—
 - He is a male Child who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron—
 - the promise given to Christ Jesus the Messiah...
 - And John simply says that the child was caught up to heaven...
 - With these few words, he describes the death, resurrection, and ascension of our LORD Jesus Christ...

b. Unable to destroy the child, now that He is safe at God's right hand,

- Satan is seen to turn his attack upon the woman!

1) In verse 6, we are told that she flees into the wilderness to escape him...

- This is perhaps a reference to the great prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24 where He commanded His people to flee from Jerusalem when they saw it surrounded by the Romans...
 - We are told from church history that this is exactly what the believers did...
 - They fled to place called Pella where they were protected during the terrible destruction of Jerusalem.
- 2) In the wilderness, God protected and provided for His people, just as Jesus promised, for a set period of time...
- It is for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, or 42 months...
 - which is the same as described over in verse 14 as a time, times and half a time...or three and half years...
 - a time being one year,
 - times being two more years...
 - and a half a time being a half a year.

TRANS> Now I want you to look over at verse 13-17...

- c. Verse 13-17 seems to be describing the same flight of the woman...
- 1) It is a flight that occurs because of Satan's pursuit of her after Christ ascends to heaven and casts Satan out...
- The events described in verses 7-12 which we will look at in a moment...
 - But you see in verse 13, that being cast out of heaven, Satan attacks the woman who bore the child...
 - Verse 12 explains that being cast out of heaven, he is going to do whatever he can to the church (that is, the woman).
 - In others words, he is going to persecute her!
- 2) But you see in verse 14 that she is given eagle's wings...to carry her to safety in the wilderness...
- This is no doubt a reference to the saying of God in Ex 19:14 and Deut 22:11 that God had carried Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness on eagle's wings...
 - It is an encouragement that He is the one who protects His church and brings her to safety...
 - She is persecuted, but she is kept by the power of God...
 - She is tempted and her false sons apostatise, but she is kept by the power of God.

- The persecution is only for a set time...
 - The serpent tries to drown her with the flood of the Roman army...
 - just as Assyria is portrayed by Isaiah as a river that tries to come up to the neck of Judea—leaving only Jerusalem...
 - but the earth helps the woman and swallows up the river.
- 3) The passage closes with the dragon going on to make war with the church...
- making war with the rest of her offspring since the male child is out of his reach in heaven...
 - And these are the persecutions of the church that continue to this day against those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.
 - It goes on from one generation to another as she continues to bear more and more children and fill the earth with them.
- B. But now then, what is the war in heaven that is fought between Michael with his angels on the one side and Satan and his angels on the other?
- What is this war and what does it show us about the way the Lord uses Satan to accomplish His own purposes?
1. We have already looked at that war...
- and we have seen that Satan does not prevail!
 - This is the LORD limiting him...
 - It is here that he is cast out of heaven...
 - and this is glorious!
2. But you might say, “why was this not done long before?”
- a. Why did the LORD wait until so late in history to cast him out when he has done so much harm?
- Why was he allowed to deceive the whole world until now?
 - It is because the LORD had a purpose for him...all the while he was using him to accomplish His plan and purpose...
- b. Verse 10-11 tells us what happened...what made the change?
- I mean, what made it to be the time for Satan to be cast out of heaven...
 - It was the finished work of Christ completed by His ascension into heaven as the Lamb that was slain for the sins of His people...

- Look at what it says in Rev. 12:10-11:
 - Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.”
3. For all those years—all those centuries—Satan was busy accusing the people of God before the Lord...
- a. And he had much to say!
 - The LORD Himself declared, during those days, that He had good reason to destroy His people—to blot them out because of their sins...
 - And Satan loved every minute of it!
 - The drama of God was to have Satan there,
 - declaring how great the church’s wickedness was for all those years...showing how desperate we were and how unworthy of God’s acceptance.
 - God purposed that all this should be so!
 - b. But then Jesus comes!
 - 1) And with Him
 - “salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come”
 - This is the advent of the kingdom of grace that John and Jesus declared was at hand...
 - This is the saying of Jesus that he saw Satan fall from heaven...
 - It is this event that occurred when Jesus went up to the ancient of days to sit at His right hand,
 - and was
 - Dan 7:14: “given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.”
 - 2) But look at what it was, according to Revelation 12:10 & 11 that brought about the change so that it was time for Satan to be cast out!
 - When Jesus ascended, Satan’s accusations could no longer stand!
 - He had accused them day and night and they had no recourse!

- But **now** they “overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and by the world of their testimony.”
 - Do you see the glory?
 - **Now** they could claim the shed blood of Jesus Christ—**now** they have Him as their advocate pleading His redeeming blood!
 - No charge against them can stand because Christ has atoned for all their sins!
 - Satan is silenced!
 - It is time for him to go!
 - The church is forever reconciled to God through the blood of the everlasting covenant.
 - There is now therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus!
- c. Do you see how gloriously God used Satan?
- 1) His malicious accusations were heard until Christ laid down His life for us!
 - It is the glorious drama of history in which Satan has an integral role!
 - He needed to be there with all his accusations so that God’s Son could be glorified and honoured as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!
 - So that the change that Jesus brought could be highlighted!
 - 2) Christian, take heart!
 - Nothing is out of control!
 - Satan is not out of control—he is rebellious, he is diabolical, he will be at last cast into the lake of fire...
 - but everything he does is totally integral to the plan and purpose of God...
 - And God’s plan and purpose is a glorious, wise, and marvellous plan!
 - The LORD indeed limits and orders all his sins to His own glory.
 - 3) Already He has used Satan to show us how definitively Christ has put an end to every accusation against us...
 - Satan, the accuser has—as the accuser—been utterly silenced in Heaven.

- God receives you on the basis of the blood of the Lamb!
- The way into His presence that was shut by sin is wide open.
 - You are fully accepted brothers and sisters!
- Romans 8:31-39: What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- Satan is busy tempting and persecuting,
 - and he will go on doing this until the end...
 - but his accusations have been utterly silenced!
 - As accuser, Christ has shut him up forever because Christ has conquered our sin.