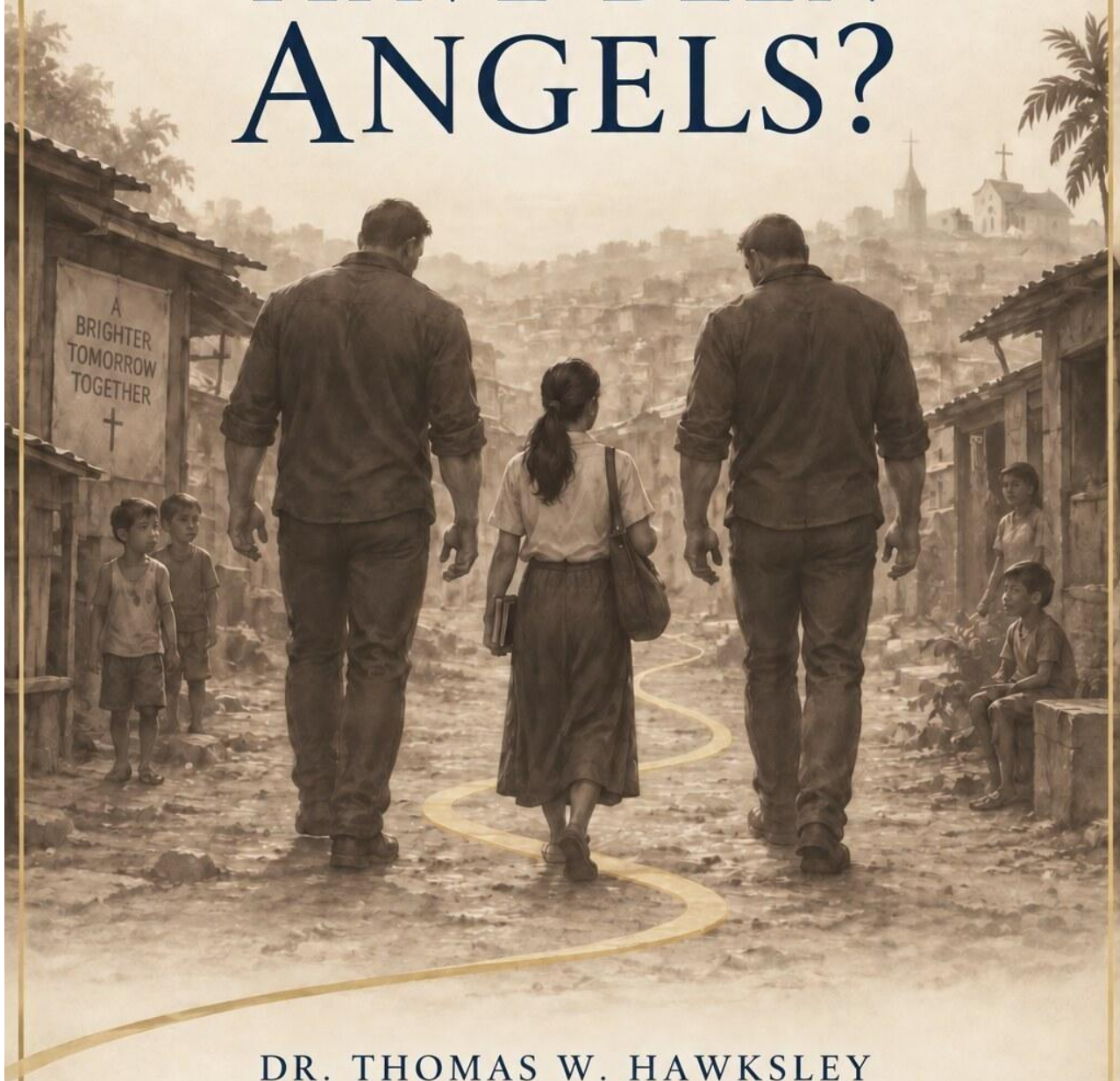


REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

HE SHALL DIRECT THY PATHS
A FOUR-PART SERIES | PART TWO OF FOUR

COULD THEY HAVE BEEN ANGELS?



DR. THOMAS W. HAWKSLEY

PROVIDENCE • PROTECTION • SURRENDER • COVENANT

Could They Have Been Angels?

Sermon Transcript

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let us Reason Together the Word of God.

If this is your first time with us, you are an honored guest.

You are welcome here whether you arrived with strong faith, difficult questions or no certainty about what you believe.

Honest questions are not enemies of faith.

They can become doors through which we enter a deeper examination of truth.

If you would like us to stay in contact with you, our guest card asks for only your first name and email address.

We do not need your home address, telephone number or a complete history of your life. We simply want the opportunity to welcome you and let you know what is happening at Reason Together Church.

Our Keiki Kids Center is available for the children, and families are always welcome to keep their children with them if they prefer.

After the service, please join us at the Reason Together Cafe.

The coffee is free, and so are the refills on conversations.

COFFEE reminds us that Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere.

Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, thank You for bringing us together today.

Thank You that the world we see is not the limit of the world You made.

Thank You for every way You have protected us, including the ways we never recognized.

Give us confidence in what Your Word clearly teaches.

Give us humility where Your Word leaves room for mystery.

Protect us from superstition, sensationalism and spiritual pride.

Fix our attention upon Jesus Christ, who is greater than every angel and worthy of all worship.

In the name of Jesus we pray.

Amen.

Our Scripture reading comes from Hebrews 13:1-2.

"Let brotherly love continue.

"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

Before we begin, I want to say a brief word about giving.

We do not pass an offering plate at Reason Together Church.

Our guests are never expected to give.

If you are a member of another church, I encourage you to support your home church faithfully.

For those who consider Reason Together Church their church home and feel led to give, there is a giving box in the back.

Second Corinthians 9:7 tells us, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."

Christian giving is an act of worship, never a price paid for divine attention or protection.

God's care cannot be purchased.

That leads naturally to our question because today we are considering one of the unseen ways through which the Bible says God sometimes cares for His people.

As many of you know, I very rarely preach a series.

Normally, we take one question, open our Bibles, reason through that question together and then move on to something different.

There are occasional reasons to group studies together.

The Ten Commandments belong together, even though each commandment deserves its own careful examination.

This series is another exception.

As Danielin and I approach our twentieth wedding anniversary, I have become a little sentimental.

I have been thinking about where we started, how we met and how God brought us from there to where we are today.

But this is more than a journey down memory lane.

Our story contains serious questions about the ways God directs, protects, teaches and corrects His people.

Personal experience can raise those questions.

Only the Bible can serve as our final authority for answering them.

That is why we are taking four studies to examine one continuing story.

In Part One, we asked, "How Do You Know When a 'Coincidence' Is God?"

Today, in Part Two, we ask, "Could They Have Been Angels?"

In Part Three, we will ask, "Am I Seeking God's Will or God's Approval?"

Finally, in Part Four, we will ask, "Does God Choose Whom We Marry?"

The series is called "He Shall Direct Thy Paths." Its foundation is Proverbs 3:5-6.

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Last week we began on a road in Cebu in the Philippines.

I had read Proverbs 3:5-6 early that morning.

Later, in a church I had never visited, the Bible study opened to those exact verses.

Then our group traveled into a desperately poor squatter community to share the Gospel. While a leader explained the area to me, I looked up the road and saw a young church worker walking toward us.

Her name was Danielin Parillo.

Today she is Danielin Hawksley.

She is my wife.

But at that moment, I had only just met her.

As she walked toward us, I was suddenly filled with anxiety.

I could not explain it.

Nothing visible told me what was wrong.

People were walking back and forth.

Members of the church were carrying on their work.

The group leader continued speaking.

Yet I became convinced that Danielin was in danger.

My heart raced.

I remember praying four words.

"God please help her."

I wanted to run toward her, although I did not know what I was running toward or what I thought I would do.

For reasons I still cannot explain, I did not move.

I looked at the people standing near me.

No one seemed to notice my alarm.

When I looked back up the road, Danielin was still walking in my direction.

But now two very tall and very large men were walking beside her.

One was on her right.

One was on her left.

Each appeared to have one hand upon one of her shoulders.

As they walked, one of the men seemed to bump into another man in the street.

That man fell to the ground.

Neither Danielin nor the two large men reacted.

I stared for several seconds.

I blinked.

I rubbed my eyes.

When I looked again, Danielin was standing directly in front of me.

The two men were nowhere to be seen.

She explained that she had become separated from her group.

She had come to find them because the church workers were not supposed to witness alone.

She looked back up the road, saw her friends and returned to them.

Nothing in her manner suggested that anything unusual had happened.

I do not remember much of the rest of that outreach.

I know we visited people.

I know we shared the Gospel.

I know we ate lunch somewhere.

But my mind was in a haze.

I kept replaying those few seconds.

Who were those men?

Where had they come from?

Where had they gone?

Had I seen what I thought I saw?

On the ride back, Danielin sat farther away in the jeepney.

I wanted to speak with her, but she and a friend got out before we reached the church.

I remained unusually quiet.

Someone finally observed that Danielin must have made quite an impression on me because I had hardly said a word.

That was true, but it was not the whole truth.

I was not merely thinking about the woman.

I was thinking about the men.

I was thinking about my prayer.

I was thinking about angels.

The next morning, I changed my plans so I could return to that church.

Danielin was teaching Children's Church.

When we finally had an opportunity to talk, I did not waste much time.

I told her about the feeling that she was in danger.

I told her that I had prayed.

I described the two large men walking beside her.

I explained that one appeared to knock another man to the ground.

I told her that they were gone when I looked again.

The expression on her face made me feel as though I had just described a flying saucer landing nearby.

I am fairly certain this beautiful church worker thought the visiting American missionary was a little strange.

She may not have been wrong.

Nearly twenty years later, I still cannot tell you with certainty what I saw.

That uncertainty is important.

The question is not, "How can I prove that those men were angels?" I cannot prove it.

The question is, "Could they have been angels?"

To answer that, we must begin with what angels are.

Angels are not imaginary decorations placed on Christmas cards.

They are not chubby babies floating on clouds.

They are not deceased people who earned wings.

The Bible never teaches that human beings become angels when they die.

Angels and human beings are distinct parts of God's creation.

Psalms 148 calls upon the angels to praise the LORD and then explains why.

Verse 5 says, "Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created."

Angels are created beings.

They are powerful, but they are not all-powerful.

They may possess knowledge beyond ours, but they are not all-knowing.

They may move in ways we cannot, but they are not present everywhere.

They are never God.

Hebrews 1:14 calls them "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation."

The word angel describes a messenger.

Angels belong to God.

They carry out His will.

They deliver messages, worship before His throne, execute judgment and sometimes protect His people.

But we must never allow fascination with servants to replace worship of the Lord they serve.

The entire first chapter of Hebrews establishes that Jesus Christ is greater than the angels.

Hebrews 1:4 says He was "made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." Angels are servants.

Jesus is the Son.

Angels worship Him.

Jesus never worships them.

That distinction becomes essential whenever people speak about angelic experiences. The Bible also shows that angels do not always look the way religious art has taught us to expect.

Scripture describes cherubim with wings.

Isaiah describes seraphim with six wings around the throne of God.

But when angels appear to people in the ordinary course of Biblical events, the text frequently describes them as men.

Genesis 18 tells us that Abraham looked up and saw three men standing near him.

He offered water for their feet.

He arranged a meal.

They ate under a tree.

As the account continues, Abraham realizes that this was no ordinary visit.

Genesis 19 then identifies the two visitors who entered Sodom as angels.

They looked sufficiently human that Lot welcomed them as travelers and the men of the city saw them as men.

Judges 13 tells of the angel of the LORD appearing to Manoah and his wife before the birth of Samson.

Manoah asked the visitor to remain while he prepared food.

Only after the angel ascended in the flame from the altar did Manoah fully understand whom he had encountered.

That pattern helps explain our opening text.

Hebrews 13:2 says, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

Unawares means they did not know it at the time.

The stranger did not necessarily arrive glowing.

The stranger did not necessarily announce a heavenly identity.

The encounter appeared ordinary until something later revealed that it may not have been ordinary at all.

So could an angel appear as a man walking along a road?

Biblically, yes.

Could someone encounter an angel without immediately knowing it?

Hebrews says yes.

Could angels be involved in protection?

Again, the Bible says yes.

Psalm 34:7 declares, "The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."

Psalm 91:11 says, "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."

Second Kings 6 gives us one of the clearest pictures of protection that was real before it was visible.

The king of Syria sent horses, chariots and a great army to surround the city where Elisha was staying.

Elisha's servant rose early and saw the enemy.

He asked, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?"

Elisha answered, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." The servant could see the danger.

He could not see the protection.

Then Elisha prayed, "LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see."

Second Kings 6:17 says, "And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." The heavenly army did not arrive when the servant's eyes were opened.

It was already there.

His ability to see it changed.

God's protection had not depended upon his perception.

That is deeply comforting.

There may be times when God protects us and we recognize it.

There may be many more times when God protects us and we never know what happened.

We notice the flight we missed.

We do not notice the danger that never reached us.

We remember the stranger who appeared at the right moment.

We do not know how many times an ordinary delay kept us from harm.

We thank God for the visible rescue.

We should also thank Him for mercies hidden from our view.

Daniel 6 tells us that Daniel was thrown into a den of lions.

When the king came early the next morning, Daniel said, "My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me."

Acts 12 tells us that Peter was sleeping in prison between two soldiers.

He was bound with chains.

Guards stood before the door.

An angel of the Lord came into the prison.

The chains fell from Peter's hands.

The iron gate opened.

Peter walked into the street.

At first, Peter thought he was seeing a vision.

Only afterward did he say, "Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel." These passages establish that God can send angels to protect and deliver.

But we must add an essential caution.

They do not promise that every believer will always be rescued from every danger.

Acts 12 begins by telling us that Herod killed James the brother of John with the sword.

Then the same chapter tells us that Peter was delivered by an angel.

James was faithful.

Peter was faithful.

One died.

One walked out of prison.

The difference was not that Peter discovered the correct prayer formula.

It was not that James lacked faith.

God's protection is real, but His purposes are larger than our present understanding.

Psalm 91 does not give us permission to behave recklessly and demand a miracle.

Satan quoted that Psalm while tempting Jesus.

He urged Jesus to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple because the angels would protect Him.

Jesus answered, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." We may pray for protection.

We may trust God's care.

We may not manufacture danger in order to force God to prove Himself.

Jesus said that He could ask the Father for more than twelve legions of angels.

Yet He willingly went to the cross.

Angelic protection always serves the purpose of God.

It is not a guarantee of personal comfort.

It is not a spiritual security service under our command.

This also raises the familiar question of guardian angels.

Does every person have one angel permanently assigned to protect him or her?

Many Christians believe so.

Matthew 18:10 is often cited because Jesus said of children, "That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."

In Acts 12, when the believers could not accept that Peter was knocking at the door, they said, "It is his angel."

Those verses show that the idea of angels having a special relationship to individuals was familiar.

They do not explain the arrangement in enough detail for us to build a complete doctrine around it.

The Bible clearly teaches that angels minister according to God's command.

It does not clearly tell us that every individual has exactly one assigned angel for life.

Where Scripture is clear, we should be confident.

Where Scripture is less specific, we should be humble.

Historical Christian writings have sometimes filled in details that the Bible leaves open. The book of Tobit, found in the Apocrypha and treated differently among Christian traditions, tells of the angel Raphael traveling with Tobias while appearing as a human companion.

That story influenced a great deal of later thought about guardian angels and unseen guidance.

It is useful for understanding the history of the idea.

It is not the authority upon which we will settle the question at Reason Together Church.

Our doctrine must rest upon canonical Scripture.

And canonical Scripture gives us more than enough reason to affirm that angels are real, that they sometimes appear in human form and that God may send them to minister or protect.

Scripture also gives us reason to be cautious.

Not every supernatural claim comes from God.

Second Corinthians 11:14 warns that "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light."

Galatians 1:8 says, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." Notice the standard.

Even if an angel appears, the message is judged by the Gospel already revealed.

We do not rewrite Scripture because an impressive being says something different.

We do not surrender Biblical discernment because an experience feels spiritual.

First John 4:1 says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God."

The test is never how bright the light appeared.

The test is never how powerful the emotion felt.

The test is truth.

The test is the Word of God.

The test is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We must also refuse to worship angels.

Twice in Revelation, John fell down before an angel.

Twice the angel stopped him.

Revelation 22:9 records the answer: "See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant... worship God."

A faithful angel will never compete with God for worship.

A Biblical encounter with an angel points beyond the messenger to the Lord who sent him.

Now let us return to my experience on that road.

The two men appeared immediately after I prayed for Danielin's safety.

They appeared human.

Their position beside her looked protective to me.

Their sudden absence was difficult for me to explain.

Those details are consistent with the possibility of angels.

But consistent is not the same as conclusive.

The men could have been ordinary people who approached and then moved out of my line of sight.

Stress, heat, unfamiliar surroundings and intense emotion could have affected my perception.

My memory could have arranged details more neatly after the event than they appeared in the moment.

There may be an ordinary explanation that I did not see then and cannot reconstruct now.

I must be honest about every one of those possibilities.

I must also be honest that I saw what I saw.

I prayed, "God please help her."

I looked again and saw two imposing men beside her.

Then she stood before me safely and the men were gone.

Could they have been angels?

Yes.

The Bible permits that possibility.

Were they angels?

I do not know.

I may not know this side of Heaven.

My inability to prove their identity does not make the moment meaningless.

It teaches me something about testimony.

We can tell the truth about an experience without pretending to know more than we know. We can say, "I believe God may have protected us," without saying, "God has revealed every detail to me."

We can be grateful without becoming dogmatic.

We can leave room for wonder without abandoning reason.

Most importantly, my faith does not rest upon identifying those two men.

If I learned tomorrow that they were ordinary residents of that community, God would still be faithful.

If I reach Heaven and discover that angels walked beside Daniel in that morning, God will not become more faithful than He already is.

The certainty of my faith rests somewhere stronger than a road, a memory or two mysterious strangers.

It rests upon Jesus Christ.

Hebrews does not invite us to become preoccupied with angels.

It repeatedly directs our attention to the Son.

Hebrews 2:9 says, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death... that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." The Son of God entered His creation.

He took upon Himself our humanity.

He lived without sin.

He went willingly to the cross.

He died for our sins.

He was buried.

He rose again.

No angel accomplished our salvation.

No angel bears the name above every name.

No angel receives the worship that belongs to Jesus.

First Timothy 2:5 says, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

We do not pray to angels.

We do not seek angels as mediators.

We come to God through Jesus Christ.

Perhaps you have spent your life waiting for a supernatural sign before you will believe. You have said that if God sends an angel, arranges an unmistakable coincidence or gives you an extraordinary experience, then you will respond.

The Gospel does not require you to wait.

God has already spoken clearly in His Word.

Jesus has already entered history.

The cross has already demonstrated both the seriousness of sin and the love of God.

The empty tomb has already declared that death did not defeat Him.

Romans 10:9 says, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." If you have never trusted Jesus Christ as Savior, you may come to Him today.

You do not need to understand angels first.

You need to recognize your sin and trust the Savior.

If that expresses the desire of your heart, you may pray with me.

The words do not save you.

Jesus saves.

Pray sincerely from your heart.

Dear God, I know that I am a sinner.

I know that I cannot save myself.

I believe that Jesus Christ died upon the cross for my sins.

I believe that He was buried and rose again.

I turn from my sin and place my faith in Jesus Christ.

Please forgive me.

Please save me.

Help me follow You from this day forward.

In the name of Jesus I pray.

Amen.

If you prayed that prayer sincerely, please speak with me or another trusted Christian before you leave.

We would be honored to pray with you and help you begin learning what it means to follow Christ.

For those who already know Jesus, our first application comes directly from Hebrews 13.

Practice hospitality.

The command to entertain strangers matters more than our curiosity about whether the stranger is an angel.

We can become so fascinated by the possibility of a heavenly visitor that we overlook the lonely person standing in front of us.

Offer kindness without demanding proof that the recipient is important.

Welcome the stranger.

Protect the vulnerable.

Feed the hungry.

Visit the forgotten.

You do not need to meet an angel to participate in the protecting work of God.

Sometimes the answer to another person's prayer may be an ordinary Christian who notices, cares and acts.

Our second application is to pray confidently without trying to control the method of God's answer.

When I prayed, "God please help her," I did not specify how.

We often tell God the problem, the preferred solution, the timetable and the names of everyone He should use.

Prayer is not the management of Heaven.

Bring the need to God.

Ask boldly.

Then trust His wisdom concerning the answer.

Our third application is to keep experiences beneath Scripture.

Do not build a doctrine upon a dream, a feeling or one unusual event.

Do not allow anyone to control you by claiming that an angel gave them a private message about your life.

Test every spiritual claim by the Word of God.

Our fourth application is to direct worship to Christ.

Thank God for angels.

Thank God for ordinary people through whom He helps us.

Thank God for dangers we escaped and dangers we never saw.

But worship God alone.

Nearly twenty years ago, I left that conversation with Danielin knowing no more about the identity of those men than I knew when it began.

Something else had changed.

I had returned to the church because I wanted an explanation.

I left wanting to know Danielin better.

Soon I was arranging opportunities to spend time with her.

She wisely required that someone else accompany us.

I had only a few days remaining before I was scheduled to return to America.

My home was roughly twenty-six hours away by airplane.

Every practical fact argued against imagining a future together.

Yet my heart had begun moving faster than my judgment.

That created a new spiritual danger.

Once we strongly desire a particular answer, prayer can quietly change.

We may stop asking God to reveal His will.

We may begin asking Him to approve ours.

We may call every open door confirmation and every closed door an attack.

We may use spiritual language to disguise a decision we have already made.

That is where our story goes next.

Next week, in Part Three of "He Shall Direct Thy Paths," we will ask:

Am I seeking God's will or God's approval?

Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, thank You for the protection we have seen and the protection we will never know about in this life.

Thank You for the angels who serve at Your command.

Keep us from worshipping the messenger instead of the One who sends him.

Teach us to welcome strangers, defend the vulnerable and become willing instruments of Your care.

When experiences are difficult to explain, keep us honest about what we know and humble about what we do not.

When our desires become strong, keep our prayers surrendered.

Above all, fix our eyes upon Jesus Christ.

In the name of Jesus we pray.

Amen.

Please join us at the Reason Together Cafe.

Bring your questions and stay for the conversation.

Whether protection comes through an angel, a stranger or a path we never see, our confidence remains in God.

Aloha Nui Loa.

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH
HE SHALL DIRECT THY PATHS A
FOUR-PART SERIES | PART TWO OF FOUR

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

Could They Have Been Angels?

Protection

Hebrews 13:1-2

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

www.ReasonTogether.Church

Bring your questions. Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Introduction

Part One of this series ended deliberately before the question was answered. On a road in a squatter community outside Cebu, I saw Danielin walking toward me. I became convinced that she might be in danger and prayed four words: 'God, please help her.' Two very tall and unusually large men appeared to be walking beside her. Moments later Danielin stood in front of me, and the men were nowhere I could see.

This series began as Danielin and I approached our twentieth wedding anniversary and I found myself looking back at where our story started. Yet the purpose is more than memory. Part One asked, 'How Do You Know When a "Coincidence" Is God?' Part Two asks, 'Could They Have Been Angels?' Part Three will ask, 'Am I Seeking God's Will or God's Approval?' Part Four will ask, 'Does God Choose Whom We Marry?' Each question moves us from what happened around me toward what God was doing within me and what faithful choice requires.

The title question can be answered responsibly in two sentences. Could the men have been angels? Yes. Scripture permits that possibility. Were they angels? I do not know. That second sentence is not a failure of faith. It is an act of submission to the difference between what God has revealed and what I can reconstruct from one remarkable experience.

Hebrews 13:2 says, 'Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.' The verse establishes that an angelic encounter may occur without immediate recognition. It does not teach a method for identifying angels after the fact. The passage calls Christians to hospitality. It invites wonder, but it also restrains our certainty.

Controlling truth: The Bible permits the possibility that the two men were angels, but the surviving evidence does not permit certainty. Faith rests upon Jesus Christ and the written Word, not upon proving the identity of two men on a road in Cebu.

1. Returning to the Road in Cebu

The Prayer and the Men

The setting matters. Local Filipino believers had organized the outreach, assigned workers to groups and instructed them not to go alone. They understood the community and were actively protecting one another while they served. Danielin was not a passive figure waiting for an American visitor to rescue her. She was a church worker who had entered the neighborhood to share the Gospel.

At some point Danielin became separated from her assigned group. I did not know that at the time. I saw her walking toward me and experienced an urgent conviction that she was in danger. I did not report seeing a weapon, an attacker or an assault. The danger was an interpretation, not an observed event. I prayed, 'God, please help her.' That is the full prayer as I remember it.

I then saw two men, one on each side of Danielin. They appeared very tall and large, and it appeared that each had a hand near or upon one of her shoulders. One seemed to bump another man, who fell. I stared, blinked and rubbed my eyes. When Danielin reached me, the two men were nowhere I could see. Those are the central observations as I remember them. The word angels belongs to the interpretation, not to the visual description.

Danielin's Account

Danielin explained that she had become separated from her group and had come to find us. She did not report seeing the two men or experiencing an attack. Her account confirms part of the

setting: she was alone because she had been separated from the others. It does not independently confirm the men or my sense of danger.

This difference should not be hidden. Honest testimony does not become stronger when gaps are covered with dramatic details. It becomes more trustworthy when the witness distinguishes what was observed, what another person confirmed and what remains unknown. I believe God heard my prayer. I cannot make Danielin a witness to something she did not perceive.

The Conversation the Next Day

After the outreach, our attention moved to the responsibilities of the mission trip. Meals, travel, preaching and conversations with church workers filled the day. The unusual road scene remained with me, but there was no immediate opportunity to investigate it carefully. The next day, when we discussed what had happened, the question became unavoidable: Who were those men, and why could I no longer see them when Danielin reached me?

The conversation did not produce an identification. It produced possibilities. Perhaps the men were ordinary people who moved out of my field of vision. Perhaps distance, obstruction, intense attention or the unfamiliar setting affected what I saw. Perhaps God sent angels. The proper conclusion must fit the available evidence, and the evidence does not allow us to eliminate every ordinary explanation or to prove the extraordinary one.

2. What the Bible Means by Angels

Created Beings

The word angel describes a messenger. In Scripture, the term can sometimes refer to a human messenger, but it most often refers to a created spiritual being who serves God. Psalm 148 calls angels to praise the LORD and then says, 'for he commanded, and they were created.' Angels are not eternal rivals to God. They owe their existence, authority and purpose to the Creator.

Colossians 1:16 places visible and invisible creation beneath Christ: 'all things were created by him, and for him.' Thrones, dominions, principalities and powers do not stand beside Jesus as competing centers of authority. Whatever order exists among heavenly beings, all were created through Him and for Him. Christian teaching about angels must therefore begin with Christ rather than curiosity.

People Do Not Become Angels

Popular stories often say that a deceased person has become an angel. Scripture does not teach that. Human beings and angels are distinct orders of creatures. The redeemed remain human,

raised and glorified through Christ. Jesus said that resurrected people are 'as the angels of God in heaven' with respect to marriage, not that they change species and become angels.

This matters pastorally. We do not need to diminish the Christian hope of resurrection by replacing it with a sentimental transformation. The believer's hope is not to become someone else's hidden guardian. It is to be raised by Christ, to be with Him and to share in the renewal He has promised.

Ministering Spirits

Hebrews 1:14 calls angels 'ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.' Their service is assigned. They are sent. The verse directs gratitude toward the God who commands them, not toward the servants themselves. Angels may protect, announce, strengthen or execute judgment, but they do not act as independent spiritual powers available for human control.

The Biblical picture differs from both skepticism and fascination. Skepticism removes creatures whom Scripture plainly affirms. Fascination makes them the center of spiritual life. The wiser path accepts their reality, receives the comfort of God's unseen government and keeps attention fixed upon the Lord they obey.

3. The Son and His Servants

Hebrews Begins With Christ

Hebrews does not introduce angels to satisfy curiosity about the unseen world. It presents them to magnify the Son. God has spoken in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things and by whom He made the worlds. The Son is the brightness of God's glory, the express image of His person and the One who upholds all things by the word of His power.

The chapter then asks, 'For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son?' The expected answer is none. Angels worship Him. His throne is forever. They are ministers, but He is Lord. Any teaching that makes an angel equal to Jesus, a secret replacement for Jesus or a source of revelation that contradicts Jesus has already abandoned the structure of Hebrews.

One Mediator

First Timothy 2:5 says, 'For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.' Christians do not require an angelic intermediary to reach God. We pray to the Father through the Son. We ask God for protection. We do not pray to angels, issue commands to them or attempt to learn the name of a personal angel.

If the men in Cebu were angels, they were servants of Christ. If they were ordinary men whose presence God used providentially, they also remained under Christ's government. In either case, the theological center does not change. God heard a prayer, Christ remains sufficient and no creature is entitled to the worship due the Creator.

Do Not Worship the Messenger

Revelation twice records John falling before an angel. Twice the angel refuses: 'See thou do it not.' The angel identifies himself as a fellow servant and directs worship to God. Colossians 2:18 likewise warns against a voluntary humility and worshiping of angels. A genuine angel never needs to compete with Christ for attention.

This provides a practical test. A story about angels is spiritually unhealthy when it produces obsession with invisible ranks, private names or special status. A Biblical account of angelic ministry should produce worship of God, confidence in Christ, obedience to Scripture and humility about ourselves.

4. Angels Who Look Like Men

Abraham and Lot

Genesis 18 opens with the LORD appearing to Abraham and with Abraham seeing three men. Abraham offers water, food and rest. In Genesis 19, two angels arrive at Sodom in the evening, and Lot receives them as travelers. The narrative moves between visible men and angelic identity without suggesting that their appearance was obviously supernatural from the beginning.

These chapters establish an important possibility: angels may appear in a recognizable human form and may be received as ordinary visitors. The text identifies the visitors for the reader because inspired Scripture gives that interpretation. A modern witness does not possess the narrator's authority merely because an event resembles the pattern. Similarity creates possibility, not proof.

Manoah and His Wife

Judges 13 gives another example of delayed recognition. The angel of the LORD appears to Manoah's wife, and she describes 'a man of God' whose countenance was 'like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible.' Manoah later speaks with the visitor and asks his name. Only after the visitor ascends in the flame of the altar do Manoah and his wife understand more fully whom they encountered.

The account shows that even within Scripture, recognition may develop slowly. It also warns against making appearance the decisive test. Manoah's wife perceived something extraordinary, but the narrative's certainty comes from what God chose to reveal through the inspired account. Our experience must remain beneath that authority.

The Language of Luke and Acts

At the empty tomb, Luke speaks of two men standing by the women in shining garments. At the ascension, Acts describes two men in white apparel. Cornelius later speaks of a man in bright clothing who stood before him. The surrounding narratives disclose heavenly agency, but the initial visual language remains human in form.

Therefore the fact that the Cebu figures looked like men does not rule out angels. Their size, position and sudden absence from my sight are consistent with an extraordinary interpretation, but they are not features Scripture gives as a diagnostic checklist. Angels in the Bible do not all look alike, and unusual-looking people are not thereby angels.

Hebrews 13 and Unrecognized Hospitality

Hebrews 13:1 begins, 'Let brotherly love continue.' Verse 2 follows with the command not to forget hospitality to strangers because some have entertained angels unawares. The ethical command comes first. Christians welcome strangers because love is required, not because every guest might provide a supernatural experience.

The phrase 'unawares' means the hosts did not know at the time. It defeats the assumption that spiritually mature people always recognize angels. The verse offers no visual test and no promise that we will later discover the guest's identity. It makes ordinary hospitality weightier precisely because the identity of the stranger may remain unknown.

5. Angels and Protection

The Angel of the LORD Encampeth

Psalm 34:7 says, 'The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.' The image is military and comforting. God's protection surrounds His people even when they cannot see it. The next verse does not tell believers to search for angels. It says, 'O taste and see that the LORD is good.' The gift leads attention to the Giver.

Psalm 91:11 similarly says, 'For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.' The promise belongs to trust in God. It cannot be detached from God's will and turned into

a guarantee that believers will avoid every injury. The New Testament's use of the psalm makes that limitation unmistakable.

The Unseen Army

In 2 Kings 6, Elisha's servant sees an enemy army and fears. Elisha answers, 'Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.' He then prays that the young man's eyes may be opened. The servant sees the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha.

The heavenly host was present before the servant perceived it. Sight did not create the protection. This account comforts believers who never witness anything visibly extraordinary. God's care is not measured by the number of unusual experiences we can report. He may protect through heavenly servants, human wisdom, ordinary restraint or means we never discover.

Daniel and Peter

Daniel testified that God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths. Acts 12 records an angel entering Peter's prison, striking him on the side, releasing his chains and leading him past the guards. In both accounts, Scripture explicitly identifies angelic action. These events establish that God can send angels to protect and deliver His servants.

They do not establish that every rescue will occur in the same way. Earlier in Acts 12, Herod killed James the brother of John with the sword. Peter was delivered, while James was not spared execution. The contrast appears in one chapter so that no one can turn angelic protection into a formula or accuse a suffering believer of inadequate faith.

Protection Without Presumption

In the temptation of Jesus, Satan quoted Psalm 91 and urged Jesus to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. Jesus answered, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.' A promise of protection does not authorize manufactured danger. Trust obeys God within the path of duty. Presumption creates a crisis and then demands that God prove Himself.

Jesus later said He could ask the Father for more than twelve legions of angels. Yet He went to the cross in obedience to the Father's redemptive purpose. Angelic power did not remove suffering from the center of salvation. Protection must therefore be understood beneath the cross, where God's faithfulness was present even when rescue from pain was not His purpose.

6. Guardian Angels: What We Can and Cannot Say

Their Angels and Peter's Angel

Jesus warned against despising little ones because 'in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven' (Matthew 18:10). When Peter arrived after escaping prison, the astonished believers said, 'It is his angel' (Acts 12:15). These texts permit the idea of a special relationship between angels and particular people.

They do not explain a universal system in which every person has exactly one permanently assigned guardian angel. Matthew emphasizes the Father's concern for little ones. Acts reports what surprised believers said before they understood that Peter himself was at the door. A reported belief inside a narrative is not automatically a complete doctrine.

Comfort Without Speculation

Christians may take comfort that God sends heavenly servants according to His wisdom. We do not need to number them, name them or determine which angel belongs to whom. The secrecy protects the center of faith. The Father sees, the Son reigns and His servants carry out His will.

If an unseen guardian was involved in Cebu, God knows. If the two men were visible human beings, God also knows their identity and purpose. The lack of a complete angelic system does not diminish divine care. It prevents us from speaking beyond revelation.

7. Test Every Spiritual Claim

An Angel of Light

Second Corinthians 11:14 warns that Satan can transform himself into an angel of light. A beautiful, luminous or emotionally powerful appearance is not self-authenticating. The spiritual world is not morally safe merely because it is spiritual. Every claim must be judged by God's revealed truth.

First John 4:1 says, 'Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God.' Biblical openness to angels does not mean gullibility. Biblical caution does not mean unbelief. The believer can affirm what Scripture affirms while refusing every message, practice or demand that contradicts Scripture.

Even If an Angel Preaches

Paul gives the strongest possible test in Galatians 1:8: 'But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.' The authority of the Gospel does not rest upon the impressiveness of its messenger. Even an angelic claim is judged by the apostolic Gospel already revealed.

Therefore no dream, apparition, inward voice or extraordinary encounter may redefine Jesus, replace His cross, deny His resurrection or add a new condition of salvation. Private experience must bow before public revelation. The more impressive the claim, the more carefully it should be tested.

Claims That Control Other People

A leader should never use an alleged angelic message to silence questions or control another person's conscience. 'An angel told me that you must obey me' is not strengthened by spiritual vocabulary. It should be examined for Biblical truth, moral integrity, corroboration, accountability and the fruit it produces.

A genuine work of God does not need dishonesty to protect it. Questions can clarify testimony. Accountability can expose exaggeration. A Christian witness honors God by welcoming truthful examination, correcting details when necessary and refusing to gain authority from an event whose meaning remains uncertain.

8. Examining the Cebu Account

Observation and Interpretation

The most useful discipline is to separate observation from interpretation. I observed Danielin walking alone. I experienced an urgent sense of danger. I prayed. I observed two large men beside her. One appeared to make contact with another person. After staring, blinking and rubbing my eyes, I could no longer see the men when Danielin reached me.

The interpretation was that Danielin faced danger and that God sent protection in answer to prayer. The further interpretation was that the two men may have been angels. Those interpretations may be true, but they are not identical to the observations. Keeping the categories distinct allows testimony to remain vivid without becoming inflated.

Ordinary Explanations

Several ordinary factors could have affected the scene. People may have moved out of sight. Another body or structure may briefly have obstructed my view. Distance, heat, divided attention, unfamiliar surroundings, stress or strong emotion may have shaped perception. Memory is also reconstructive, particularly when an event is retold over many years.

Listing possibilities is not the same as claiming that one of them occurred. I do not know that the men turned into an alley or that visual conditions produced a mistake. No particular natural explanation should be invented and treated as fact. The point is narrower: available evidence does not exclude ordinary causes, so certainty about angelic identity would exceed the evidence.

Features Consistent With the Biblical Possibility

The account also contains features consistent with Biblical angelic appearances. The figures looked like men. Their presence seemed connected to protection. They were not recognized by Danielin. Their disappearance from my sight was sudden and unexplained. Scripture demonstrates that God can send angels and that people may encounter them without awareness.

Consistency is meaningful but not conclusive. Many ordinary events resemble portions of Biblical narratives. A resemblance can show that an interpretation is permitted by Scripture. It cannot transfer the inspired narrator's certainty to our recollection. The disciplined answer remains: they could have been angels, but I do not know.

A Language Ladder for the Evidence

Different claims in the same story deserve different levels of confidence. The following ladder keeps doctrine, observation, testimony and unresolved identity from being treated as though they all rest upon the same evidence.

Level	What may responsibly be said
Canonical certainty	Scripture teaches that angels exist, serve God and may appear in human form.
Historical observation	I saw two unusually large men walking beside Danielin and afterward could not see them.
Personal interpretation	I believed God answered my prayer and protected Danielin.
Permitted possibility	The men could have been angels. The Biblical record permits that explanation.
Unresolved identity	I do not know who the men were. The surviving evidence does not establish certainty.

9. Perception, Memory and Honest Testimony

Sincerity Is Not Infallibility

A sincere witness may accurately report what he remembers while remaining mistaken about part of its meaning. Sincerity answers whether the person intends to deceive. It does not settle perception, memory or interpretation. This is not an insult to testimony. It is a feature of every human witness except the inspired revelation God has preserved.

The Christian does not need personal infallibility to give thanks. I can say that I prayed and experienced what I received as an answer. I can also acknowledge that another observer might interpret the scene differently. Gratitude and humility can occupy the same sentence.

Memory Grows Around Meaning

Events connected to major relationships often gain significance as later years unfold. Danielin eventually became my wife. That later history naturally makes the first encounter feel like the opening of a providential story. Yet later meaning cannot retroactively prove every earlier interpretation.

The responsible storyteller returns to the earliest stable account, avoids adding details merely because they would make the scene more dramatic and distinguishes memory from later theological reflection. Our marriage may deepen my gratitude for the day. It cannot establish that the men were angels.

The Value of an Unresolved Testimony

Some believers fear that admitting uncertainty will weaken a testimony. The opposite is often true. An unresolved detail can direct attention away from the storyteller's special status and toward God's character. The hearer is not forced to accept a private claim in order to receive Biblical truth.

The testimony remains valuable even if the identity of the men is never known. It teaches prayer in a moment of concern, respect for Scripture's supernatural world, care in handling evidence and worship of Christ above every messenger. Those lessons do not depend upon solving the mystery.

10. Witnesses Beyond the Canon

A Necessary Source Hierarchy

Noncanonical writings and historical theologians can show how Jewish and Christian communities have imagined or explained angelic ministry. They can illuminate vocabulary, reception and pastoral concerns. They cannot establish doctrine. Canonical Scripture governs the conclusions, the published magazine account controls the autobiographical facts and later sources serve only as comparative witnesses.

This hierarchy is especially important because angel stories easily attract embellishment. An ancient date does not make a document inspired. A respected preacher does not make an interpretation certain. Historical witnesses are useful when their role is clear and limited.

Tobit and Raphael

The book of Tobit tells of Raphael traveling under the human identity of Azariah, guiding Tobias, protecting him and disclosing his identity later. The story provides a close literary parallel to an angel who appears as an ordinary companion and whose identity is not initially recognized.

For this study, Tobit is a historical noncanonical witness, not the doctrinal foundation. Genesis, Judges, Hebrews and Acts already establish that angels may appear in human form and minister according to God's command. Tobit shows that later Jewish readers continued to reflect upon that possibility in narrative form.

Second Maccabees and the Shepherd of Hermas

Second Maccabees 3 describes a heavenly horseman and two splendid young men intervening during an attack upon the temple treasury. The Shepherd of Hermas uses elaborate language about an angel of righteousness and an angel of iniquity. These works demonstrate enduring fascination with unseen agency, protection and moral struggle.

They also demonstrate why source hierarchy matters. Their imagery may enrich historical understanding, but it must not be combined with canonical passages as though all carry equal authority. Scripture gives enough truth for faith and practice without requiring us to adopt every later angelic scheme.

Augustine and Aquinas

Augustine acknowledged that questions about the visible and tangible appearances of angels are difficult. In the *Enchiridion*, he resisted pretending that the mechanism could be easily explained and regarded some speculation as of little practical usefulness. His restraint remains pastorally valuable.

Thomas Aquinas later argued that spiritual angels may assume bodies for a divine purpose. His account represents a historic theological explanation rather than an inspired description of the mechanism. Both writers affirm the Biblical reality of angelic appearance while reminding us that the manner of such appearance remains mysterious.

Hospitality in the Preaching Tradition

John Calvin's commentary on Hebrews 13 emphasizes the practical duty of hospitality, especially toward needy strangers and those driven from home. Charles Spurgeon's devotional treatment of Hebrews 1:14 celebrates angels as unseen attendants sent in God's service. The two emphases belong together: wonder about heavenly ministry should strengthen visible love rather than replace it.

A congregation has not obeyed Hebrews 13 merely by discussing whether a stranger was an angel. It obeys by letting brotherly love continue, welcoming the vulnerable and serving people whose identity may never become impressive. The possibility of angels makes ordinary faithfulness more serious, not less ordinary.

11. Practical Angel Theology

Welcome People, Not Experiences

Practice hospitality because Christ commands love. Welcome the lonely, displaced and unfamiliar person without testing whether the visitor seems supernatural. The stranger may be an angel, but is far more likely to be a human being who bears God's image and needs practical care. Either reason is sufficient to reject contempt.

Churches should make hospitality safe and accountable. Biblical welcome joins generosity with boundaries, screening and protection for vulnerable people. Fascination with angels must never excuse neglected safeguards.

Seek Protection Without Waiting for an Angel

When danger is present, pray boldly and use available means. Move to safety. Call competent authorities. Seek medical attention. Remain with trusted people. Follow the kind of group procedures the Filipino church workers had already established. God often protects through human courage, planning and skill.

A vulnerable person should never be told to remain in danger while waiting for supernatural rescue. The promise of angels does not cancel the duty to act wisely. Paul trusted God's promise during the storm and still required the sailors to remain in the ship. Faith receives means as gifts.

Do Not Judge the Person Who Was Not Rescued

Peter's deliverance and James's death prohibit cruel formulas. We cannot say that the injured believer lacked faith or that the absence of visible rescue proves God's absence. Some saints are delivered from the fire. Others honor God through suffering and death. Christ Himself went to the cross while legions of angels remained at the Father's command.

Pastoral care begins with presence, lament and practical help. It does not rush to explain God's hidden purpose. The doctrine of angels can assure the sufferer that creation contains more servants of God than we can see, but it must never be used to blame the wounded.

Pray to God in the Name of Jesus

The prayer in Cebu was directed to God. That pattern should remain. Scripture does not teach believers to discover, invoke or command angels. We ask the Father for help in the name of Jesus and trust Him to choose the means of His answer.

This protects both worship and peace. We do not need to know whether help arrived through an angel, a stranger, a friend, a physician or an unnoticed restraint. Thanksgiving may rise to God even when the channel remains hidden.

Pastoral safeguard: If someone is in danger, seek practical protection and competent help. Do not manufacture risk, wait passively for an angel or use a supernatural claim to control another person. Pray to God in the name of Jesus and receive every lawful means of care with gratitude.

12. Christ Greater Than Every Angel

The Gospel Does Not Depend on the Men

No one needs to believe that the Cebu men were angels in order to believe the Gospel. Jesus

Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again according to the Scriptures. That public proclamation carries divine authority. A private experience may illustrate prayer or providence, but it cannot become an additional condition of faith.

A seeker should not wait for an angelic sign before coming to Christ. God has spoken in His Son. The crucified and risen Lord openly calls sinners to repent and believe. The greatest messenger is not an angel beside a road. It is the incarnate Son who came into our world, bore our sin and conquered death.

If They Were Angels

If the two men were angels, their presence testified to the generosity of the God who sent them. They did not announce their names, demand attention or ask for worship. Their possible ministry would have been quiet, brief and directed toward protection. That pattern fits the servants described in Hebrews.

If they were ordinary men, their presence could still have been included within God's providential answer. God is not less active when He uses ordinary people. The need to prove an extraordinary mechanism can make us overlook the breadth of His care.

The Turning Point of the Series

The first two studies examined what was happening around me: repeated Scripture, converging circumstances, an urgent impression and two unexplained men. We have reached the limit of what those outward events can decide. The next question must turn inward.

As my relationship with Danielin began to develop, prayer required more than asking whether events looked meaningful. Desire itself had to be examined. Was I asking God to reveal His will, or was I asking Him to approve the answer I already wanted? Part Three will ask, 'Am I Seeking God's Will or God's Approval?'

Pastoral Summary

Could the men have been angels? Yes. Genesis, Judges, Hebrews and Acts show that angels may appear in human form, may remain unrecognized and may be sent in service to God's people. Scripture also records angelic protection in the lives of Elisha, Daniel and Peter.

Were the Cebu men angels? I do not know. Danielin did not see them. No independent witness identified them. No visible attacker was confirmed. The men were nowhere I could see when she reached me, but the available evidence does not exclude every ordinary explanation. Biblical possibility should not be inflated into historical certainty.

This restraint does not empty the story of meaning. I prayed when I believed Danielin was in danger. I saw what I received as protection. The experience led me to gratitude, wonder and a deeper consideration of God's direction. I can testify to that without requiring another believer to treat my interpretation as revelation.

Angels are created ministering spirits. They serve Christ, do not become mediators and must never be worshiped. Every spiritual message is tested by the revealed Gospel. Every story is handled with truthful distinctions among observation, interpretation and uncertainty. Every promise of protection is held beneath the cross, where God's faithfulness did not always mean escape from suffering.

Most importantly, Jesus is greater than every angel. Faith rests upon His incarnation, death and resurrection. Whether the men were heavenly servants or ordinary men used providentially, the glory belongs to God. The unresolved identity of two men cannot diminish the certainty of the Savior who has made Himself known.

An Evidence Worksheet

1. What did I directly observe, and what did I infer from those observations?
2. Which details were independently confirmed by another witness?
3. What ordinary explanations remain possible, even if I do not know that any occurred?
4. What does canonical Scripture clearly permit or teach about the experience?
5. Am I using a Biblical resemblance as possibility or incorrectly treating it as proof?
6. Does my testimony add dramatic details that were not present in the earliest account?
7. What level of confidence does each claim actually deserve?
8. Does the interpretation direct worship to Christ or fascination toward the experience?
9. Can honest questions be asked without being treated as unbelief?
10. What Biblical truth remains valuable even if the unexplained detail is never resolved?

Questions for Reflection

1. Does my view of angels begin with Christ and the teaching of Hebrews 1?
2. Have I confused deceased human beings with the Biblical teaching about created angels?
3. How does Hebrews 13 connect angelic possibility with ordinary hospitality?
4. What do Peter and James teach about protection, suffering and simplistic formulas?
5. Have I ever used Psalm 91 as permission to take an unnecessary risk?
6. What spiritual claim in my life needs to be tested by the Gospel already revealed?
7. Do I pray to God in the name of Jesus, or have I become preoccupied with intermediaries?

8. How can my church combine prayer for protection with wise practical safeguards?
9. Can I thank God for an experience while admitting that part of its meaning remains uncertain?
10. What desire within me may need examination after outward signs have reached their limit?

A Prayer for Truth and Protection

Our Heavenly Father, thank You for the servants we can see and the servants we cannot see. Thank You that nothing in heaven or earth stands outside the authority of Your Son. Protect us according to Your wisdom and teach us to receive every lawful means of care with gratitude. Guard us from unbelief that denies what Your Word teaches and from fascination that speaks beyond what You have revealed. Give us honesty about what we observed, humility about what we inferred and courage to obey what is clear. Comfort those who were not spared suffering, and keep us from judging wounds we do not understand. Fix our worship upon Jesus Christ, our one Mediator, crucified and risen for us. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

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