

My Thoughts on: The Spirit Realm

The subject of the spirit realm excites me.

If the spirit realm is transcendent, “above” the physical realm, yet occupying the same space, this would allow the spirit beings to be naturally invisible to our physical eyes yet allow them to be in our vicinity at the same time.

This transcendency of the spirit realm would also prevent any humans from entering it... on their own.

Now, how does the spirit realm exist transcendent to ours yet occupy the same space? Transcend our realm yet be immanent with it? It is not a paradox, since Jesus said he is from the “realms above,” (John 8:23) and yet angels visited him and others on earth, manifesting themselves in a way physical eyes could safely behold them, without leaving their spirit realm.—Matthew 4:11; Mark 1:13; Luke 22:43; Judges 6:21; 13:19, 20.

The account of the ascending angel in Judges 13:20 is especially interesting, as it is similar to Jesus’ ascension. Regarding the implications of this, *Insight on the Scriptures* under “Ascension (Correctness of the Term),” page 187, wisely notes:

Jesus’ ascension, while beginning with an upward movement, from the viewpoint of his disciples, may have thereafter taken any direction required to bring him into his Father’s heavenly presence. It was an ascension not only as to direction but, more important, as to the sphere of activity and level of existence in the spirit realm and in the lofty presence of the Most High God, a realm not governed by human dimensions or directions. (underscore added)

Thus, the upward movements of Manoah’s angel in Judges 13:20 and Jesus’ ascension were illusions playing on the illustration that “heaven” is a realm above the sky. This illustration is seen in Genesis 28:12-13, which reports of Jacob’s dream of the ladder or staircase “stationed upon the earth and its top reaching up to the heavens,” with “God’s angels ascending and descending on it,” and God himself stationed above it. This illustration is seen again in Revelation 12, which contrasts heaven with earth and identifies heaven as God’s abode. This dual registry harmonizes with John 8:21, 23, where Jesus said the spirit realm is above our world, where we cannot go on our own. That heaven is not literally or directionally above earth is seen with the angel in Judges 6:21. Here, he returned to heaven with no ascension, instead he simply vanished from physical sight, like an angel did in Acts 12:10. The resurrected

Jesus also returned by vanishing, and could reappear at will. (Luke 24:31; John 20:26) This indicates that heaven as the spirit realm transcends the physical realm. While it is a higher realm, it cannot be pointed to—one cannot point “up” to the sky and indicate where the spirit realm is. That is why the above *Insight* article quote finishes that this realm is “not governed by human dimensions or directions.” An illustration of this relationship could be that the spirit realm is to the physical realm like the physical realm is to a two-dimensional plane. A manifestation of a spirit being could then be likened to one of us sticking a finger into a two-dimensional plane and interacting with a two-dimensional being.

So, if astronauts went straight up from earth trying to imitate Jesus’ ascension to reach “the person of God” (Hebrews 9:24), they would never succeed. They would never succeed since they would never exit the physical realm. It’s simply not for us to do that. It would be like a two-dimensional being trying to enter our world by moving “up.” Thus, only by resurrection into the spirit realm can a human enter it.

This model also makes the notion of Jesus’ dual nature completely absurd. For Jesus to retain his human body would mean that he is divided between two realms, one transcendent to the other!

Emphasizing that absurdity is *The Watchtower* of April 15, 1963 p. 238, which stated in the article “Identifying the Resurrected”:

Another thing: If Jesus had his human body in heaven, then he has the entire digestive system, including the mouth and the stomach; and his faithful disciples, on going to heaven, would have the same things. We remember that Jesus said to them: “I make a covenant with you, just as my Father has made a covenant with me, for a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom.” (Luke 22:29, 30) Well, then, after eating and drinking, the food and drink would go through their digestive systems. So what? Well, Jesus said: “Whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught.” (Matt. 15:17, AV) Think of it! Since the arrival of human bodies, there now have to be draught houses in heaven, toilets, both private and public, with separate ones for men and women. And now and forever Jesus, who the clergymen say is very God himself, has to use a heavenly toilet, something that he never had to do in heaven before he became a man! This has to be true if we carry arguments to their logical conclusions!

In conclusion, it is a sobering pleasure knowing God’s holy spirit is in our midst, however transcendent, knowing we can be sensitive to its leadings as well as to angelic direction.

Tired Angel?

Daniel 9:20-23 is an interesting passage, and one that may not be as clear as we would like. The NWT faithfully translates verse 21 as: “and [while] I was yet speaking in the prayer, why, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the start, having been made weary with tiredness, was arriving by me at the time of the evening gift offering.” The footnote on the underlined part informs us that this is according to the Hebrew, but adds: “LXX [Greek *Septuagint*], ‘being borne along speedily’; Vg [Latin *Vulgate*], ‘flying speedily.’” The book *Pay Attention to Daniel’s Prophecy!* is interesting on this. On page 185 it highlights that Gabriel arrived speedily, but does not mention him being tired. The *Insight* book under “Angel” sites this passage, and simply notes that angels can travel at “tremendous speeds, far exceeding the limits of the physical world.”—page 107.

Some have understood this verse to mean that the angel Gabriel expended so much energy traveling so quickly to Daniel that it left him tired when he reached him. However, I wonder if it’s possible that:

1. If Gabriel was indeed tired, was this perhaps due to fighting demon forces as in Daniel 10:13?
2. Or was it Daniel who was tired, since it was “at the time of the evening gift offering”? For instance, note how the NASB renders it: “the man Gabriel...came to me in [my] extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering.” JP Green’s translation reads similarly: “the man, Gabriel...touched me in *my* severe exhaustion, about the time of the evening sacrifice.” (italics original)
3. Or is it that Gabriel just arrived swiftly, as indicated in the LXX? (Other translations follow it and the Vg over the Hebrew in this verse.)

Since it was evening, it may be more likely that Daniel was weary with tiredness. After all, even if the angel was tired for some reason, why would he manifest himself that way?

Additional thoughts on Daniel 9:21

The NET Bible has:

[Y]es, while I was still praying, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen previously in a vision, was approaching me in my state of extreme weariness⁵², around the time of the evening offering.

[footnote 52:] The Hebrew expression (mu’af bi’af) is very difficult. The issue is whether the verb derives from (’uf, “to fly”) or from (ya’af, “to

be weary”). Many ancient versions and modern commentators take the first of these possibilities and understand the reference to be to the swift flight of the angel Gabriel in his coming to Daniel. The words more likely refer to the extreme weariness, not of the angel, but of Daniel. Cf. Dan 7:28; Dan 8:27; Dan 10:8-9; Dan 10:16-17; also NASB. (net.bible.org/bible.php?book=Dan&chapter=9%3A21#v52)

Gabriel was definitely intervening in our physical space, manifesting himself in a way that appeared to be physical and like a man.

From our perspective, it appears he traveled at superluminal speed, exceeding the speed of light. But his perspective was likely quite different from ours and Daniel’s. From Gabriel’s perspective, it was probably more like a routine maneuver, like one of us sticking our hand into an aquarium and interrupting a fish (comparable to sticking a finger into a two-dimensional plane and interacting with a two-dimensional being). Thus, if the text refers to great speed, it is describing Gabriel. But if it refers to fatigue, it is likely describing Daniel. The NWT reflects the ambiguity of the Hebrew by not associating the tiredness to either Daniel or Gabriel, as it allows for the reading of Daniel being the tired one.

Materialized Angels

In the Bible there are many examples of spirit creatures assuming human form. Regarding their bodies, *Insight on the Scriptures* under “Body (Spiritual Bodies),” page 348, comments:

While there are physical bodies, visible and palpable, there are also spiritual bodies, invisible to human eyes and entirely beyond human senses. (1Co 15:44) The bodies of spirit persons (God, Christ, the angels) are glorious. “At no time has anyone beheld God.” (1Jo 4:12) Man cannot see God and live. (Ex 33:20) When the apostle Paul had only a glimpse of the manifestation of Jesus Christ after Jesus’ resurrection, he fell to the ground and was blinded by the brilliance, a miracle being required to restore his sight. (Ac 9:3-5, 17, 18; 26:13, 14) Likewise, angels are far more powerful than men. (2Pe 2:11) They are glorious, brilliant ones and have appeared as such in physical manifestations. (Mt 28:2-4; Lu 2:9 [and Da 10:5-6]) These spirit sons of God have vision strong enough to see and endure the brilliance of the Almighty God.—Lu 1:19. (underscore added)

So while some manifestations were glorious and visionary, some angels actually became physical. The article continues under the subheading “Christ’s Body of Flesh,” page 349:

Jesus, having been resurrected as a spirit (1Pe 3:18), could materialize a body for the occasion as the angels did in past times, when they appeared as messengers. (Ge 18:2; 19:1, 12; Jos 5:13, 14; Jg 13:3, 6; Heb 13:2) During the days before the Flood, the angels that “did not keep their original position but forsook their own proper dwelling place” performed an incarnation and married human wives. That these angelic sons of God were not truly human but had materialized bodies is shown by the fact that the Flood did not destroy these angels, but they dematerialized and returned to the spirit realm.—Jude 6; Ge 6:4; 1Pe 3:19, 20; 2Pe 2:4. (underscore added)

Thus when Jesus was born, he was fully human, not able to dematerialize or discard his body! Adding to this and contrasting angelic bodies with Jesus’ body is the entry “Jesus Christ (His Birth on Earth)” in *Insight on the Scriptures* page 56:

Prior to Jesus’ birth on earth, angels had appeared on this planet in human form, apparently materializing suitable bodies for the occasion, then dematerializing them after completing such assignments. (Ge 19:1-3; Jg 6:20-22; 13:15-20) They thus remained spirit creatures, merely employing a physical body temporarily. This, however, was not the case with the coming of God’s Son to earth to become the man Jesus. John 1:14 says that “the Word became flesh and resided among us.” For that reason he could call himself “the Son of man.” (Joh 1:51; 3:14, 15) Some draw attention to the expression “resided [literally, “tented”] among us” and claim this shows Jesus was, not a true human, but an incarnation. However, the apostle Peter uses a similar expression about himself, and Peter was obviously not an incarnation.—2Pe 1:13, 14. (underscore added)

So how exactly did those angels and the resurrected Jesus materialize? Did they literally turn their spirit bodies into human flesh? Or did they construct real, functional male bodies and possess them? As they were able to discard them, their mind and power was not surrendered in the materialization process, but remained transcendent. Thus the above comments appear reasonable, that they employed physical bodies temporarily to suit a particular purpose, like a hand in a puppet. This is manifested in Jesus’ ascension. When he was resurrected and materialized before Mary Magdalene, she grabbed hold of him, showing he

was not appearing visionary but was tangible, and he said to her: “I am ascending to my Father.” (John 20:17) Thus when he ascended, it was his spiritual, transcendent mind and power that moved his physical body upward before discarding it—perhaps by atomization. Thus Jesus fully returned to the spirit realm by removing his “hand” from the “puppet” and demolishing it, like other spirit creatures did with their materialized bodies.

An important difference

The difference between a materialized spirit and the born Jesus is significant. A materialized spirit could never offer himself as a corresponding ransom for the sins of humanity. (1 Timothy 2:5, 6) A materialized spirit could never fully “sympathize with our weaknesses.” (Hebrews 4:15) A materialized spirit could instantly heal injuries no matter how serious, whereas Jesus could not without his God’s power. That would severely affect how you would view a test or threat against your physical body. But Jesus could fully “sympathize with our weaknesses” as he was in danger of physical injury, pain, and fatigue. Although he performed miracles with his God and Father’s power, he still knew what it was like to be born from a mother and to grow to manhood. (Luke 8:46, 9:43; John 10:32; 1 Corinthians 1:24) Therefore the difference is very much an ontological one. Materialized spirits are ontologically spirits, not humans. The born Jesus was ontologically human, not spirit.

Links

- The Bible’s Viewpoint: Is God Everywhere?
(www.watchtower.org/e/20050308a/article_01.htm)
- Who Is God? (www.watchtower.org/e/20020515/article_02.htm)