

The Watchers

In Daniel 4 we learn that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had a dream that troubled him. During his dream a “watcher” appeared:

Daniel 4:13: “I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, **a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven;**”

This watcher says a number of things and then concludes with this:

Daniel 4:17: “This matter is by **the decree of the watchers**, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that **the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men**, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.”

Everyone is familiar with the angels – a group of supernatural beings that go around doing the will of God. When people think of angels they usually think of guardian angels, who watch over God’s people.

But who, exactly, are the watchers? Verse 17 tells us that Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity was being imposed by the decree *of the watchers*. The watchers decreed it so that people might know that God is the one who appoints kings and deposes them. In other words, the king’s insanity was done for the glory of God *by the watchers*. Given that these watchers can enact binding decrees on the most powerful rulers on Earth *and then carry them out*, it would seem that these mysterious watchers have a great deal of power.

As far as I can tell, this is the only chapter in the Bible that mentions the watchers. In Revelation, however, we find this unusual creature:

Revelation 4:8: “And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and **they were full of eyes** within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.”

The four beasts were said to be “full of eyes”. Could they be the watchers? It’s impossible to say, but it’s interesting to think about.

What the book of Daniel tells us is that there is a council of “holy ones” that has great power and that does things on behalf of God's glory. If the watchers really are angels then this expands the scope of angelic activity. Not only do angels watch over God’s people and battle the forces of darkness, but they apparently also issue binding decrees.

We are used to the idea of *people* taking the initiative to do something for the glory of God, but it’s a bit jarring to think that *angels* might do the same thing. We tend to think of angels as a race of robots that only acts when God gives them an order. Yes, angels clearly act when God commands them – but is it possible that in some cases they might take the initiative? Might there be more to them than we think?