

God's Unseen Messengers

*"Ye are come unto
mount Sion, and
unto the city of the
living God, the
heavenly
Jerusalem, and to
an innumerable
company of
angels."*

—Hebrews 12:22

THE WORD ANGEL, OR AN-

gels, is used in the Scriptures more than three hundred times, and yet we feel sometimes that we know very little about them. However, a careful study of this subject can be very rewarding and faith-strengthening.

Not all references to angels in the Bible are to spirit beings. The word angel simply means 'messenger,' and though it most often refers to spirit beings it may also apply to any agency or power, whether animate or inanimate, that God would be pleased to use in connection with that service. God could make the winds or the flaming fire his messenger, or another human being.

Our attention here is upon the holy angels of God—his invisible or unseen messengers—which the Bible tells us are the primary agencies by which our Heavenly Father fulfills his will in respect to overruling the affairs of mankind, and they have

been given a special charge over his chosen people—the heirs of salvation. “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”—Heb. 1:14

CHARACTERISTICS OF ANGELS

There are many things we do not know about angels, but there are some important things that we do know. We know that angels were created as free moral agents, mortal beings, in the image of God. They had the freedom to choose between serving God or a course of rebellion against him. Some of them chose a course of evil and became messengers of Satan instead of God. The Bible foretells their ultimate destruction, along with Satan. How many these will be, we do not know.

Job 38:7 speaks of a time in the distant past when there was no rebellion in the angelic realm—“When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” These holy angels are more than just messengers, or servants of God, they are his ‘sons’ and have access to God’s presence at all times.

We believe that the *Logos*—God’s only begotten Son—was the only direct creation of God and that all other life, including Lucifer and all of the angels, were created by the *Logos*. “By him [God’s Son] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.”—Col. 1:16

ACTIVITIES OF THE HOLY ANGELS

We learn a lot about the angels when we notice in the Bible the many accounts of their activities as

they carry out the purposes of God in the earth as his messengers. It is our understanding that in nearly every instance the holy angels represented God in his dealings with Israel and all of the prophets in the Old Testament. For instance, when God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush, it appears to be like a conversation between God and Moses, but in Exodus 3:2, it declares that it was an angel of the Lord that spoke to Moses on God's behalf. Likewise, when Moses received the Law in the holy mount and all the instructions concerning that Law and the Tabernacle arrangement, in the Old Testament account it states that it was God who talked to Moses, but in Galatians 3:19, the apostle declares that the Law was "ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator [Moses]." The apostle also refers to this in Hebrews 2:2, "The word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward."

In Genesis 32, it tells of Jacob wrestling with a man (a materialized angel) all night long, and Jacob would not let him go until he had received a blessing. (vss. 24-26) Then in verse 30, the account says, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." We believe that these angels were in the position of representing God so completely that they could speak and act as God himself. If this be true, it is very important then that these holy angels be perfect and thus able to reflect in their own characters the exact image of God, in every way.

We see God's mighty power demonstrated through the angels. It took only one angel to smite all of the firstborn of Egypt, and this same angel led the children of Israel out of Egypt. (Exod. 14:19)

On another occasion, seventy thousand rebellious Israelites were slain by a single angel.—II Sam. 24:15,16

THE ANGELS' MINISTRY TO JESUS

Angels ministered to Jesus throughout his earthly walk (Matt. 4:11), and at the close of his life, as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, an angel strengthened him. (Luke 22:43) On that same night as Peter was trying to protect him with the one sword that they had, Jesus said to Peter, put the sword away, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53) If it had been God's will for the angels to save our Lord at that time, one angel would have been enough. Jesus, though, continued by saying if the angels were to save him, "How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?"—vs. 54

What a great temptation it must have been for his guardian angel, or angels, to reach down, as it were, and protect Jesus on that occasion. They knew, though, that it was God's will for him to be tried, persecuted, and finally crucified on the cross, and these holy angels always carried out the Father's will perfectly.

The holy angels also have emotional qualities such as we of humankind have—they sing beautifully together and praise God when there is some great event to celebrate such as the birth of Jesus. (Luke 2:13,14) They also experience great joy when they observe a sinner repent and turn to the Lord.—Luke 15:7

INVISIBLE MESSENGERS TO THE CHURCH

These same angels that have been fully dedicated to the service of God as his invisible messengers down through the ages have a very special and peculiar mission during this present Gospel Age. Every one of the Lord's little ones, all those who are in covenant relationship with God, have become the special charge of the holy angels. "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone."—Ps. 91:11,12

All of the Lord's people should rejoice at this text of scripture! These holy angels are the eyes of God, observing everything that is going on in the lives of the consecrated.

These angels are also spoken of as the eyes of the Lord in the earth. We read in II Chronicles 16:9, "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." This text should not give us the thought that it is necessary for God to personally behold every individual act of his people. The eyes referred to are God's influence, his power of knowing, whatever the means. Whether his power is exercised and his will executed through angels, other forces or agencies, or by himself personally, it makes no difference, because it all is at his direction and overruling.

MINISTERING SPIRITS

We understand that each one of the Lord's people, in proportion as he is one of God's true children, has a ministering spirit, an angel, who has charge of his affairs. These angels, then, care for

us, supervise our affairs, and are God's agencies or channels of communication to us as to his will and providential care over us. There are two key thoughts that we should have in mind as we consider the ministry of the holy angels. First, our guardian angels abide with us continually and we are their special charge. This is shown in Psalm 34:7, which reads, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them [cares for them]." The word 'encampeth' means to 'abide' or 'perpetual habitation.'

Secondly, our guardian angel has instant access to the Father at all times in connection with his ministry to us. This is indicated in the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:10, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That . . . their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." We should remember that our guardian angels share our Heavenly Father's concern for our spiritual well-being, and being directed of God, and his will, they have never made a mistake in their overruling of the affairs of his people.

Another point to be kept in mind in respect to the ministry of the holy angels is that, notwithstanding their ministry to us, we still "walk by faith, not by sight." (II Cor. 5:7) Therefore, it is God's will that the ministry of the angels in the lives of his people be accomplished in what appears to us as natural processes, rather than direct miracles. Also, the overruling of the angels in our lives is always accomplished in a way that will not interfere with our own free moral agency. If we are determined to follow our own will in a given matter,

and do not seek God's guidance and overruling, then our guardian angel will probably not interfere, and perhaps we will learn a bitter lesson from the experience later. However, if God's will is our chief concern in everything in our lives, then our guardian angels are ready to help us in every way, that as New Creatures we may prosper and be blessed.

GUARDIAN ANGELS

Our guardian angels do many things on our behalf. Sometimes they are used to give us strength to endure our experiences. It may not be God's will for us to be immediately delivered from a trial, but he will always give us strength to go through them. When Jesus prayed during the agony of his Gethsemane experience, it was an angel who ministered unto him, and strengthened him. (Luke 22:43) Our guardian angels will do the same for us in response to prayer.

Deliverance will come in the proper time and way in many of our trials, and sometimes angels are used to accomplish this. We remember how Paul was delivered from death on several occasions in order that the Gospel might be preached in other places. Acts 5:17-20 is an account of the priests and leaders of the people taking all of the apostles and putting them in a common prison. The account says, "The angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." (vss. 19,20) That was how they got in prison in the first place, and yet God, through the angel, told them to go out and do the

same things again! This is an important lesson for us. The angel of the Lord will, at times, deliver us also from our trials, but not so we can take it easy and be more comfortable in this life. Rather, they will deliver us in order that we might continue the work of sacrificing the flesh and its interests, laying down our lives for our brethren, and preaching the Gospel to others.

Our guardian angels also protect us from unnecessary evil—they lift us up, lest we dash our “foot against a stone.” (Ps. 91:12) We can think of this as the little unseen things that our guardian angels do for us daily. If we only knew how many times the angel of the Lord has protected us and kept us from harm. The burden of our prayers should be that of thanksgiving to God for his daily tender mercies and care over us through his angels. Prayer is important in these little things. It is encouraging when we hear the followers of the Lord recount the many little leadings of God in their daily experiences which have been the result of prayer and supplication. Our guardian angels respond to these prayers so long as they are inspired by proper motives and in harmony with God’s will.

All of the truly consecrated should be able to testify to the goodness of the Lord in these little things from day to day that sometimes almost seem miraculous. Let us be sure our motives are right, and then seek God’s help and blessing in these little experiences of our daily lives. These holy, guardian angels are carefully watching every aspect of our lives—we are never alone. They represent the Father’s presence with us daily and hourly.

THE PSALMIST'S TESTIMONY

The psalmist describes this close, daily and hourly watchcare of our Heavenly Father, saying, "O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.

"Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.

"I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.

“How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee. Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, ye bloody men. For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain. Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”—Ps. 139

HEAVENLY MANNA PROVIDED

A very important ministration of the angels is that of assisting in supplying our needs, both temporal and spiritual. God has promised to supply all our needs, and we should thank him daily for his temporal provisions. More important, though, are our spiritual needs. He daily supplies us with manna—bread—from heaven. In the 6th chapter of John, Jesus said he was that bread from heaven (vss. 32,33,35), and the words he would speak are “spirit and life.” (vs. 63) We remember that the manna provided for Israel in the wilderness which they gathered daily was prepared by the angels. In Psalm 78:25, it says that they did eat “angels’ food.” Our guardian angels are very interested in our spiritual well-being. They have arranged the affairs of God’s people so that many have opportunities to study, to fellowship, to learn from one another, attend meetings and conventions, to

partake of this spiritual manna. Some of the Lord's people are isolated and may not have all of these privileges, but, if it is through no fault of their own, we believe that God especially protects them, cares for them, and makes up to them in other ways that their spiritual life may prosper.

THE PROSPECT BEFORE US

The wonderful fellowship we enjoy when gathered together with others of the household of faith is but a foretaste of that grand gathering that awaits us if we are faithful to our covenant with God. Such is the sentiment of our theme text, 'Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels.' Oh, what joy awaits us when, if faithful, we come unto the city of the living God and see our Heavenly Father and our dear Lord Jesus face to face, and then meet this innumerable company of angels that were so directly involved in our lives during our earthly walk. Perhaps we will have an opportunity to meet our guardian angel, and to share fellowship and shed the tears of joy together as we talk about some of our experiences in the Christian way, and rejoice with them in the greatness and the goodness of our loving God who has called us to sonship in his Divine family for all eternity.

We should now be making plans to attend that convention in the heavenlies. We do this by our determination to do God's will daily as best we can, and the giving of all diligence to make our calling and election sure. (II Pet. 1:10) We have the mighty power of God working on our behalf, and his great

love and compassion, all being ministered to us through his holy angels. Failure can only come if we neglect our consecration. Let us never “neglect so great salvation.”—Heb. 2:3 ■

“We are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”

—Romans 6:4,5