

Ministering Spirits

“Of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. ... Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”
—Hebrews 1:7,14

OUR TEXT INDICATES THAT the Heavenly Father, in caring for our needs as his children, uses heavenly messengers, or angels, who are sent forth under his general direction. Each of these is invested with adequate power to perform the task appointed, which is to assist, deliver, guide, and bless the people of God in their

joyous, yet difficult, pilgrimage along the narrow way.

Man was created a little lower in nature than the angels, yet these heavenly beings have always been interested in man. Hence they are enthusiastic and happy coworkers with God in all things pertaining to his plan as it relates to the human race. Described in Job 38:7 as the “sons of God,” they are said to have “shouted for joy” when this earthly domain was created.

The angels’ continued interest in the human family is reflected in their keen desire to understand the

writings of the Old Testament, which reveal, in prophetic language, the divine purpose of redemption through Christ. The apostle says that the angels desired to look into these things, but were not permitted to understand them until the due time for their fulfillment.—I Pet. 1:12; Rev. 5:1-7

The angels have not been honored with so deep an insight into God's plan for human redemption as have the footstep followers of Jesus, nor been called to the high position in that plan of joint-heirs with him in his kingdom. Yet they gladly serve in the more humble capacity of helpers to the future royal family of heaven and earth.

Jesus, in sounding a warning to those who might think to oppose his followers, mentioned the protection afforded them by these spirit messengers, saying, "In heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 18:10) Of himself the Master said that he could ask the Father and, if it was in harmony with his will, he would provide more than twelve legions of angels for his only begotten Son's protection. (Matt. 26:53) Indeed, holy angels are spoken of in the Scriptures as possessing power that would baffle all human conception. A single angel was said to have struck down 185,000 Assyrians in one night.—II Kings 19:35

ANGELIC MINISTRIES IN OLD TESTAMENT TIMES

As already indicated, the angels served as God's ministers in ancient times, even as they are the invisible guardians of the church now. The Old Testament is replete with narrations of the presence and power of these ministering spirit beings. Frequently when God spoke to his servants, an

angel was the instrument used to produce the audible voice, the angel being commissioned to speak in Jehovah's name. The Apostle Paul informs us that "the word spoken by angels was stedfast."—Heb. 2:2

One of the earliest accounts of angelic intervention explicitly stated to be such is in the case of Hagar, after she and her young son, Ishmael, had been banished from Abraham's household. Out in the desert, with bread and water exhausted, she wept bitterly, assuming her son would die. We are told that an angel called to her out of heaven and said: "What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink."—Gen. 21:17-19

Aside from God's personal interest in Hagar and her child, Ishmael, he used them as illustrations of fleshly Israel and his dealings with them under the Law Covenant. As an angel ministered to Hagar and Ishmael, so God's dealing with the Israelites in connection with the Law is said to be by means of angels through Moses the mediator.—Gal. 3:19; 4:24-31

ABRAHAM ENTERTAINS ANGELS

We remember, too, when Abraham was sitting during the noonday heat under the shelter of his tent door, he was startled by the sudden approach of three strangers. Apparently there was a display of royalty in their demeanor, because Abraham bowed himself to the ground before them, offering his hospitality. (Gen. 18:1-8) These strangers were

materialized angelic messengers, sent to Abraham by God, and charged with the commission of conveying a most important message to him, which was a reaffirmation of the divine promise that Sarah was to bear him a son.—vss. 9-16

Neither Abraham nor even the angels who had spoken to him realized the full import of the promise concerning the son, or “seed,” to come through Sarah. No doubt they were not fully informed concerning the seed as pointing forward to Christ and his church, the royal nation being developed through faith, during the present Gospel Age. (Gal. 3:16,26-29) Nevertheless, it was a happy privilege for the angels, and a blessed experience for Abraham and Sarah, to have even this limited share in the outworking of the divine promises. Later, when Abraham is raised from the dead, and the plan of God is unfolded to him in its fullness, he will know who constitutes the real seed of promise. By then, too, the angels who visited him on that memorable occasion will doubtless also fully understand these things.

The message brought to Abraham and Sarah on this occasion was one that must have been difficult to believe, and even contrary to all natural laws. Yet, in due time, that unexpected angelic announcement was fulfilled. Never has a holy angel gone forth from the presence of the Most High to any nation, people, or person, with false or uncertain tidings. The word spoken by the holy angels is the utterance of God’s will, and therefore fully dependable. Though Satan and his servants conspire to thwart the accomplishment of the divine purpose, the power of Almighty God stands back of every message he sends by the ministering spirits of heaven, and those messages

have been recorded for our particular benefit.—Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:11

The all-important message the angels had for Abraham was that pertaining to the promised seed, and the blessing that was to come through that seed. Just so, the most important part of God's message to us today is that of a promised spiritual seed, Christ and his church, and the resulting blessings to all mankind. The fact that the Lord also informed Abraham in this same setting of the coming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, points us to the soon destruction of Satan's world. (Gen. 18:17-33) This knowledge in itself would be of little value were it not that we know that after the dissolving of Satan's empire there is to follow the "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," in which the completed spiritual seed, the greater Isaac, will be the righteous rulers.—II Pet. 3:13

ANGELS MINISTER TO DANIEL

The inspired prophecy of Daniel is both interesting and important in view of its remarkable delineation of future events to be fulfilled in God's plan. His predictions extend to the culmination of the "time of the end" of this age, and tell also of the Messianic kingdom which is to be the administrative power in the affairs of men throughout the new dispensation soon to come. He foretells the First Advent of the Messiah and of his sacrificial death, in which he would be "cut off, but not for himself." His prophecy also points out the return of Christ at his Second Advent, the raising of the dead, the destruction of evil, and the establishment of a universal reign of righteousness on the ruins

of the present imperfect governments of men.—
Daniel 2:44; 9:24-27; 12:1-4,8,9

The angel Gabriel was used as the messenger for much that Daniel predicted and prophesied. Thus, the mysteries of unseen future eras and events were furnished to the prophet in that manner. (Dan. 9:3,20-23; 10:9-12) We recall that Daniel was a captive in a foreign land when he wrote his prophecy, but he was true to his people and to the God of his fathers. He resisted the fascinations and corruptions of Babylon's court life with which he was surrounded, and challenged the admiration of his enemies by his purity and integrity.

Daniel's knowledge and wisdom, under divine providence, resulted in a rapid advancement at the court of Darius, the Median king who ruled following the fall of Babylon. The favors bestowed upon Daniel by Darius awakened cruel jealousy in the hearts of other officials. Out of this there developed a wicked plot against Daniel, the servant of God, which resulted in his being cast into a den of lions.—Dan. 6:1-17

The king, who had been tricked unwittingly into the plot to destroy Daniel, came to the lions' den the next morning, hoping that the prophet's God had protected him. Upon inquiry, he found that indeed, his hope had been justified, and his trusted servant was still alive. We quote Daniel's explanation to Darius of what had occurred: "My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt."—vss. 19-23

Thus, by an angel of God, was effected a deliverance of Daniel from the attacks of literal lions. Christians also are subjected to attacks likened unto that of lions. Peter says, "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." (I Pet. 5:8) However, as with Daniel, so with the footstep followers of Christ, "The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them," and they are delivered from the destructive purposes of Satan.—Ps. 34:7

PREPARING THE WAY FOR MESSIAH

We next recall Israel's priest, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, and how he was overcome with fear at the presence of an angelic visitor. Once again it was the angel Gabriel. Gabriel soothed the alarm of the priest with words which filled his heart both with amazement and delight: "Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John." —Luke 1:5-13

Both Zacharias and his wife were "well stricken in years," so it was hard to believe the joyous tidings that Gabriel had brought, even though they had come from the lips of an angel. It was but natural, therefore, that he should inquire, "Whereby shall I know this? ... And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed." In fulfillment of this, Zacharias' lips were sealed, and he remained without speech until after the birth of John.—vss. 18-20,57-64

JESUS' BIRTH

The announcement of the Savior's coming birth was also made by the angel Gabriel. Nine months later, when Jesus was born, the glorious tidings of his birth were declared by angelic lips. (Luke 1:26,27; 2:8-15) Later, Joseph was told by an angel, "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word." (Matt. 2:13) Joseph obeyed, following the angel's instructions, and escaped from the jealous power of Herod. What a precious life was thus delivered from peril, and how highly did God thus honor and wondrously use his angelic servants!

This angelic guardianship over Jesus continued, for, when Herod was dead, Joseph and Mary were again instructed in a vision by an angel to return to their own land. When doubtful about the rule of Herod's successor, they were given further counsel and direction. (vss. 19-23) Thus did the holy angels keep constant watch over the precious life of the one who would be man's Redeemer. There can be no doubt that the angels of heaven continued to be the swift and powerful ministering servants of the Master. Throughout his earthly walk it was their privilege and joy to attend him day and night. They were his unseen helpers at every step of the way.

MINISTERING TO THE SAINTS

The same holy and powerful angelic beings who attended the Savior all through his earthly pilgrimage are also ministering spirits to his footstep followers. Just as the angelic hosts helped him in all his trials and sufferings, they are now in constant attendance over all his saints—his brethren. Irrespective

of their needs, the holy angels are competent to guard their steps from danger, and to deliver them from the “snare of the fowler.” (Ps. 91:3,11) Indeed, how much we need to be defended against the assaults of the Adversary and other enemies which unitedly are endeavoring in every way to defeat us who are the soldiers of Jesus Christ.

The ministry of the angels is invisible to our human eyes, and is accomplished by power that is beyond the earthly realm. God is above all that we call nature, and the holy angels are his mighty messengers. While God does not perform his work contrary to the laws of nature, except when necessary, yet what we understand as natural law is never an obstruction to the accomplishment of his will as committed into the hands of his angelic ministers. No place where dwells the child of God can be so dismal, no cavern so deep and dark, no fortress so strongly guarded, that the angels cannot find quick and easy access.

Angelic power, under divine commission, is superior to all physical laws. This was evidenced by the miraculous deliverance of the Apostle Peter. His chains fell off and the huge iron gates of that ancient prison opened at the angel’s bidding, without being touched by the hand of man. (Acts 12:1-11) The ministrations of the angels are equally efficient on land, on the sea, or in the air. Wherever God’s people are at any moment, angels are present to care for them.

THE ENCAMPMENT OF ANGELS

We quote again these words: “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” (Ps. 34:7) This pictorial

language suggests that our guardian angels do not work on our behalf simply on occasions of great and dire peril. The word “encampeth” literally means in the Hebrew to “pitch a tent.” This suggests that the angels are never absent, but always on duty, and fully vigilant. Symbolically speaking, they pitch their tents around all the followers of the Master, and spread over them their shields of protection, as it may be in harmony with the Heavenly Father’s will.

Let us remember, however, that while God always works through such instrumentalities as may serve his purposes best, still it is God himself who directs the work. Whatever help we have from angels or human instruments is really the help of God, as though he personally were present to put forth his mighty arm and work directly on our behalf.

In all ages God has used the ministry of the holy angels for the benefit of his people. Even now, in these dark and evil days, God’s angels continue to guard the followers of the Master, so that no outside power nor influence is able to separate them from the love of God. (Rom. 8:35-39) Tenderly, these ministering spirits wait and watch, always alert to the needs of even the weakest follower of the Lamb of God. Their vigil will not end until the last member of the church, the body of Christ, is “faithful unto death,” and raised to “glory and honour and immortality” in the heavenly phase of Christ’s kingdom. (Rom. 2:7; Rev. 2:10) Then, the glorified church will join with its head, Christ Jesus, in extending God’s blessings to all the families of the earth, just as was promised so long ago to Abraham by the angelic hosts.—Gen. 18:17,18; 22:15-18 ■