The Ministry of Angels

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

Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many mansions." (John 14:2) We know from other disclosures of God's Word that there are different orders of living beings on the spirit plane of existence. (Eph. 1:21, Col. 1:16) There is a wideness in the vast domain of God that is comparable only to the wideness of his loving mercy. He has seen fit to employ certain spirit messengers in his dealings with mankind, and we have come to know something about them.

We believe that the Heavenly Father governs mankind in part through these messengers who, as royal ministers from him, come directly from the courts of heaven. They are invested with adequate power to bless, instruct, guide, protect, and deliver the true children of God throughout their earthly lives.

These messengers are spoken of in the Bible as having participated in the general rejoicing that followed the creation of man near the close of the

sixth creative day. Job 38, verses 4 and 7 read, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? … When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"

The angelic sons of God had long been witnesses of the great creative work that had been carried out under the direct supervision of Jesus in his prehuman existence. The Bible states that he was the "word" [Greek: *logos*] of God and that "all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men." (John 1:1-4) Evidently this heavenly angelic host had been appointed to positions of responsible service. They thus shared to some extent in the accomplishments of the different creative days.

The angels were committed to duties that they performed in obedience to divine command. They possessed perfectly developed, intellectual minds. They could well understand that in the creation of perfect human beings with powers of procreation, this new order of intelligent life constituted a complete departure from likeness to any previously existing angelic being.

We know from God's Word that the holy angels are special servants of God. They are imbued with the fullness of desire to hold to the divine purpose in all the issues of truth and grace. As such, they carefully watch the unfolding of God's infinite wisdom and love, and they are radiant with holy delight in the mighty trusts to which they are appointed.

A Shadow Cast

When Jehovah unveiled to their sight the splendor of his finished work of Creation, all their glorious

ranks broke forth in shouts of joy, as previously noted from Job 38:7. While from then until now they have continued to perform high ministries between heaven and earth, a dark cloud of sin, and the effect of selfish desire translated into sinful action, was soon to cast a terrible shadow over the joys of the creative work in Eden. There was a brilliant, beautiful, and powerful angelic being, Lucifer, who said in his heart, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: … I will be like the most High." Of him it is recorded, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!"—Isa. 14:13,14,12

Thus arose the first rebellion in the universe of God recorded in the Scriptures. Others of the angelic host fell later from their high estate. (Gen. 6:1-4; Jude 1:6) Legions of holy angels, however, have remained true to their sacred trusts, and they have special interest in the uplift of mankind. It was by an apostate from their own ranks that the pure, fair creatures of paradise in Eden were seduced.

The terrible curse of sin and death was wrought by the malicious scheme of angelic envy. As the holy angels survey the sorrows of our world, they must feel humiliating sadness that some who were once pure and loyal as themselves should have been the betrayers of mankind.

Such knowledge has heightened the holy angels' interest in our race as the objects of the Savior's love and redemptive work. They are bound to Christ by profound affection. They love and adore him as the only begotten Son of God. They see in him the promised and certain victor over evil, and the rightful and mighty ruler in God's due time of

our present alien world. They share in Christ's love for mankind.

Ministering Spirits

As allies of Christ, the holy angels are the "ministering spirits" of the saints, sent forth to serve the "heirs of salvation." (Heb. 1:14) These loyal angels are spoken of in the Scriptures by terms implying their number is so great that it baffles the human mind to give expression to it. Jesus said he could in an instant call to his aid more than twelve legions of angels. (Matt. 26:53) A single one of these angels of the Lord smote one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians in one night. (II Kings 19:35) The Bible declares that they "excel in strength."—Ps. 103:20

Familiar with the works of God, how vast must be the angels' understanding of natural and spiritual forces. They are the guardians of the good of the earth, also the sleepless watchers over our lives and destinies, and as sentinels at the gates of danger. Though they salute us with no audible voices and cheer us without visible signs, their presence and their ministries are as real as when they gave announcement of the birth of Jesus with song and great glory.—Luke 2:8-14

The ministry of angels occurred frequently in Old Testament times. Their service was recorded in Israel's affairs. The patriarchs knew of them and were familiar with their visitations. It has been asserted as highly probable that in all the instances narrated in the first fifteen chapters of Genesis, in which the Lord is said to have spoken to Noah, Lot, and Abraham, the audible voice was

that of an angel—Jehovah speaking by his commissioned messengers.

In the Bible record, God most often spoke to man by his holy angels, except when he has spoken by the prophets, by his Son, or by the Apostles. (Heb. 1:1,2; Jude 1:17) As Hebrews 2:2 records, "The word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward."

Early cases of angelic intervention involved Hagar on two occasions. In the second instance she was in the desert, alone with her ill and starving son, the bread and water exhausted. She sat apart from him and sent forth into the heavens her cry of despair. An "angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, 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) This record of Hagar's experience can be taken by us as a lesson, that when there is no earthly ear to hear, nor heart to pity, the penitent and imploring prayer of a righteous person will be heard.—James 5:16

Angels Visit the Patriarchs

When Abraham was ninety-nine years of age, sitting at midday in the opening of his tent, he was surprised by the approach of three strangers with royal bearing, to whom he responded by advancing and bowing himself to the ground before them, and by offering them ample hospitality. (Gen. 18:1-10)

These strangers were angelic messengers, having materialized in human form for the purpose of their visit. They had come to announce to Sarah and Abraham that a child of divine intention should be born to them in their extreme old age.

Notwithstanding the teachings of science and the laws of nature, this strange angelic announcement stood fast. Never has any angel gone forth from the presence of the Most High to any nation, people, or person with uncertain tidings. The "word spoken by angels" is as sure as the utterance of the lips of God; and though thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers conspire to thwart its accomplishment, not one jot or tittle shall fail.—Heb. 2:2

This angelic group, however, was on a double mission. When their visit to Abraham and Sarah was ended, they went their way toward the doomed cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. At eventide two angels, not three, entered the gates and stood before Lot, the only righteous man in all the city of Sodom.

At the break of the following day, those ministers of wrath to Sodom and Gomorrah, hastened to lead forth Lot and his family to be saved out of the two doomed cities. When they entered Zoar, several miles distant, there burst forth torrents of brimstone and fire; and the smoke of their swift destructive force rose over the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and all the surrounding plain.—Gen. 19:1-25

Another angelic manifestation to be found in the Scriptures involved Jacob fleeing from the wrath of Esau, his brother. It was at the close of day that Jacob, a weary and lonely fugitive in the midst of an open field with darkness only for a curtain and the

stars for his sentinels, came to a place, later called Bethel, to get some sleep.—Gen. 28:11

In his sleep he saw a ladder, reaching from earth to heaven, thronged with angels on errands of peace and blessing, serving between God's footstool and his throne. (Gen. 28:12) These messengers were not sent to a glamorous court, but to a lone wanderer. Here in picture and prophecy are depicted angel vigils over the weary and exposed pilgrims of earth. Again is brought to our minds the comforting assurance of our opening text that the "angel of the LORD encampeth round about them" that reverence him.—Ps. 34:7

Source of Comfort

These words of the psalmist are a source of comfort to the true Israel of God. Jesus said in Matthew 18:10, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." Truly the angel of the Lord surrounds those that reverence him. They do not come and go simply in great and dire perils. They are never absent, but always on duty, fully armed and vigilant, ministering to the needs of God's people.

The angels formed a cloud of darkness between Israel and Pharaoh's pursuing hosts, acting as a wall of protection to God's people as they crossed the Red Sea. (Exod. 14:19,20) Concerning spiritual Israel, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb. 1:14) The apostle also gave these words of warning to the Hebrews, "If the word spoken by angels was stedfast,

and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him."—Heb. 2:2,3

In the light of these, and many correlative scriptures, it is a lack of trust to question or dispute that to the holy angels are committed important ministerial trusts. Their ministry is connected with bringing about salvation for the church, and restitution for the world spoken of by all of the Old Testament prophets, and by Christ and the apostles as well.

Daniel's Ministry

The inspired revelation of Daniel is quite interesting. His prophecies cover all the great governments of the world and include Jesus' First Advent, his crucifixion, and resurrection. Also included are the return of Christ at his Second Advent, the raising of the dead, the destruction of all that is evil, and the establishment of an everlasting kingdom of righteousness and peace on the earth.

Much of Daniel's instruction came to him through an angel. Concerning a considerable portion of that which the prophet foresaw and made prophetic predictions, the angel Gabriel was his authority. (Dan. 8:16; 9:21) We have been given to know that the words spoken by angels to the prophets have stood, are standing, and will continue to stand fast until their fulfillment.

Daniel was a captive in a foreign land, but he was true to his people and to the God of his fathers. He resisted the fascinations and corruptions of court life, and challenged the admiration of his enemies

by the exalted purity and dignity of his character and conduct. God honored him as few men have been honored.—Dan. 10:10-14

The honors, however, bestowed upon Daniel by the Babylonian and Median kings awakened in the hearts of certain subordinate officials of the government the most cruel jealousy. By a wicked plot he was cast into a den of ferocious lions. A miracle was wrought on his behalf. Standing by Daniel's side throughout the night was a holy angel.

Then the voice of Darius the king was heard, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" Then Daniel answered, "O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me."—Dan. 6:20-22

Birth of John the Baptist

Angels played important roles in preparing for the birth of our Lord, and in the events of the Christ child. An angel was sent to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist. Zacharias was overcome with fear at the presence of the angel visitor; but the angel said, "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 1:13

Zacharias, however, knowing that both he and his wife Elisabeth were "well stricken in years" could scarcely accept such joyful tidings, though they came from the lips of an angel; and he said, "Whereby shall I know this?" (vs. 18) and the angel answered and 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." (Luke 1:19,20) Instantly, Zacharias' priestly lips were sealed, and he remained speechless until the birth of John the Baptist and his circumcision at eight days old.—vss. 57-64

Ministry of Angels Toward Jesus

Likewise, the first announcement of the Savior's birth was made by an angel. The First Advent sermon was preached by an angel. The first redemption song ever sung to mortal ears burst in wondrous melody from a multitude of angel voices.—Luke 2:13-15

Later the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph, who was told: "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word." (Matt. 2:13-15) Accordingly Joseph and Mary, in instant obedience to the divine command, took the child Jesus and set forth to go to Egypt.

Their heavenly guardian did not forget his trust. At the proper time, the angel again visited Joseph and Mary in Egypt at divine command, telling them to return to the land of Israel. (vss. 19-23) Thus the holy angels kept watch over the child Jesus. In this, how beautifully we see a fulfillment of these words, "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands."—Ps. 91:11,12

At the age of thirty, the scene of the resistance by Jesus to the snares of the great Adversary was in the wilderness, away from the sight and sympathy of men. He was alone in the sense that up to then

he had no selected and announced ministry, no human companions, or followers. Yet he was not alone, for the guardian angels of heaven were close about him, subject to call as his holy bodyguard, his allies, swift and powerful ministers from the Father to his beloved Son. (Matt. 4:11) Throughout all of his earthly career they attended him day and night. Even after his death, it was an angel from heaven that rolled away the stone from the tomb of our Lord, signifying his resurrection by the mighty power of God.—Matt. 28:2

Upon the explanations and instructions given by an angel depends, largely, our hope of the Savior's return, the resurrection of the dead, and the reign of the Son of God on the throne of David. How certain it is that the same holy, powerful beings who gave attendance to the Savior all through his earthly career, and ministered to him in all his trials and sufferings, also constantly attend all his saints, even the poorest and weakest. They still serve as God's messengers of love and power to all who look with faith for his divine guidance and protection.

The angels guard the steps of God's people from danger, delivering them from the "snare of the fowler." (Ps. 91:3) These ministering spirits defend them against the assaults of demons; and assuage their sorrows. They provide for their necessities, and strengthen them for all of their toils and labors of love. Truly, the angel of the Lord encamps round about all those that reverence him.

Ministry to the Apostles

Angelic power, under divine command, is superior to physical law. Untouched, Peter's chains fell

off, and the huge iron gate seemingly opened of its own accord at the angel's approach. (Acts 12:6,7,10) Wherever God's presence is, angels are there to be found. If our Heavenly Father trusts them to manage weighty affairs of divine ministration, ought we not to accept with confidence the inspired assurance that all these are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" —Heb. 1:14

Apostle John was sent to Patmos for banishment and solitude. (Rev. 1:9) The Lord turned the exile of this faithful servant into an occasion for a most remarkable revelation of the divine purpose. Events covering the rise and fall of nations, and the progress and experience of the church thenceforth to its glorification and kingdom honors, were unfolded and seen by John through the ministry of angels. These revelations were intended for the enlightenment of the saints through the centuries to follow, including the last phases of human history under the order of the "present evil world," and the opening of the new order—the "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."—Gal. 1:4; II Pet. 3:13

Angels Given Charge Over Us

We believe that God has been pleased to give his angels charge over us. (Ps. 91:11) This is not only for our protection from such evils as might otherwise befall us, but that God may endear us and them to each other, with greater resulting joy when we later meet in the kingdom of our Father. Meantime, while we may not worship angels, we may "esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake."—Col. 2:18; I Thess. 5:13; Rev. 19:10; 22:8,9

The time will come when "the voice of many angels round about the throne … and every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, … and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."—Rev. 5:11,13 ■

While Shepherds Watched

While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shown around, And glory shown around.

"Fear not," said he; for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled mind,
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring,
To you and all mankind, To you and all mankind.

"To you, in David's town, this day
Is born, of David's line,
The Savior, who is Christ the Lord;
And this shall be the sign, And this shall be the sign.

"The heavenly Babe you there shall find
To human view displayed,
All meanly wrapped in swathing bands,
And in a manger laid, and in a manger laid."

"All glory be to God on high,
And to the earth be peace;
Goodwill henceforth from heaven to men
Begin, and never cease, Begin, and never cease!"

—Hymns of Dawn