

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ANGELS

Who Are the Angels?

THE angels of God, says the apostle Paul, are -ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." Hebrews 1:14. Angels are celestial beings, seldom seen by men, but ever present for the purpose of assisting and protecting those who are seeking to walk with God. Jacob's vision was given him by God to assure him of this wonderful fact. The record says that "he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it." Genesis 28:12.

These celestial beings are not, as some suppose, the disembodied spirits of men and women who have died. They are a different and higher order of beings than men, for we were made "a little lower than the angels." Psalm 8:5. One proof that angels are distinct from human beings is the fact that before anyone on earth had died, God's angels were present to prevent Adam and his family from re-entering the Garden of Eden. (Genesis 3:24) Furthermore, there is reason to believe that each angel was especially created by God, because, as Jesus said when speaking of the saints after the great resurrection: "They neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." Matthew 22:30. The millions on the earth today have all sprung from two original beings, Adam and Eve, who were especially created by God. "And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living." Genesis 3:20. But it is not so with the angels. Each one was especially created.

In the book of Job angels are spoken of as the "sons of God" who "shouted for joy," and as the "morning stars" who "sang together," when this earth and all upon it were created by God. (Job 38:7) They are, with certain exceptions, holy ones who love their Maker, and are obedient to His commandments. (Psalm 103:20.) "The angels may have wider spheres of action and nobler forms of duty than ourselves, remarks E. H. Chapin, "but truth and right are to them and to us one and the same thing." There are many orders of angels, including cherubim and seraphim, -but their precise nature is an unrevealed mystery. (Psalm 80:1; Isaiah 6:2; Colossians 1:16, 17) It is sufficient for us to know, however, that they are commissioned by God to serve struggling men and women. Each of us has his guardian angel, as Jesus suggested in His warning: "Take heed that You 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." Matthew 18:10.

"The angels appointed to minister to the children of God have at all times access to His presence. Thus God's people, exposed to the deceptive power and unsleeping malice of the prince of darkness, and in conflict with all the forces of evil, are assured of the unceasing guardianship of heavenly angels."-The Great Controversy, page 513.

How Do the Angels Work?

THE angels work in many ways, and for many purposes. One of the most striking pictures of their activity is that given by John in Revelation, where he describes four angels holding back the winds of strife which are about to be released upon a doomed world. (Revelation 7:1-3) These winds are symbolic of the political strife and upheaval that will come upon the world in the last days just before Christ returns. The four angels are in control under God's direction, and earth's final calamities are stayed so that God's people might be saved. Thus angelic power at this time is used for the preservation of the saints.

. This picture of John's is symbolic of the work of protection which the angels have been commissioned to do from the beginning. Says the psalmist: "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." Psalm 91:11, 12. And David assures us that "the angel of the Lord encamps round about them that fear Him, and delivers them." Psalm 34:7. If we truly love God then we can be certain of the protective influence of our guardian angels.

But what precisely do they do, and how do they do it? The full answer to these questions will not be known till our life's records are, in God's good time, opened to our view. But the Scriptures contain many striking examples of which Daniel in the lions' den is outstanding. Condemned to share the company of ravenous lions, Daniel miraculously survived the ordeal. His enemies' plans were thereby frustrated

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because, as Daniel assured King Darius: "My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me." Daniel 6:22.

Even more spectacular was ' the deliverance of Jerusalem under King Hezekiah when the city was threatened by Sennacherib and his host of 185,000 Assyrians in 701 BC. Here indeed, was a hopeless situation. Humanly speaking, Jerusalem was doomed. But because Hezekiah's trust was in God, deliverance came through the intervention of an angel: "The angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and four score and five thousand. And when they [the Jews] arose in the morning, behold, they [the Assyrians] were all dead corpses." Isaiah 37:36. Historians may explain this Assyrian calamity as resulting from a sudden attack of some virulent disease but the fact is that they fell. God's people were preserved by angelic intervention. (2 Chronicles 32:1-22.)

Though, as in Daniel's case, God's messengers are not always seen, in the case of the prophet Elisha's deliverance from Dothan the protecting angels assumed the visible form of armed charioteers. The surrounding Syrian army planned to kill the prophet, because through him the Lord revealed the military secrets of the Syrians to the king of Israel. Seeing the surrounding army, Elisha's servant became alarmed. But the prophet was calm, and prayed for the young man. In response to this prayer "the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." 2 Kings 6:17. The Syrians' attempt failed because they were temporarily smitten with blindness. (Verse 18.)

Those same angels are at our service today, "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister "to the "heirs of salvation." There are many authentic records of angel ministry in our day which are similar to the above examples. Like the experience of John Wesley whose life was saved from two desperadoes in a lonely wood one night. The great Gospel preacher, riding alone, drew ever nearer his would-be killers who waited in the woods. When he reached them, they saw not one, but three riders, with Wesley in the middle and were afraid to strike. Wesley was completely unaware of his Protectors. Hearing later from those desperate men, after they were converted, Wesley was convinced that God's promise of angel protection was fulfilled on his behalf that night.

Thus will it be with us, though perhaps in less spectacular ways. As we travel, as we move among the traffic and the crowds, as we pursue our daily business whatever it may be, we can never tell how frequently the angel ministers preserve us and lead us. It may be some small thing we are led to do-or are prevented from doing, so that an unforeseen-and maybe unrealized-calamity is averted. It may be that someone is influenced to make some decision in our favor. It may be any of a thousand things, seemingly insignificant, yet ordained of God and executed by angels, because of the Father's personal interest in the welfare of those who love Him.

Who Is the Devil?

BUT not all the angels are interested in our welfare, for besides the numberless host of the angels of God whose daily task is to assist us ' is a smaller host of evil angels led by the devil. Their sole concern is to drag us down to the same ruin that will eventually engulf them. The Lord Jesus warned of the "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Matthew 25:41.

The leader of this malevolent host of "demons," or "wicked spirits" "who work not for, but against, those who shall be heirs of salvation, was Lucifer, the most exalted created being in the universe. Hence he is the one who has experienced the greatest fall. Ezekiel speaks of him under the figure of the king of Tyrus, and says that our arch-enemy in ages past was "the anointed cherub that covers," who stood in "the holy mountain of God." Lucifer occupied that supreme angelic position in heaven as God's immediate attendant. He was the angel whose wings overspread the everlasting throne. And of this exalted being the prophet goes on to say: "Thou was perfect in thy ways from the day that thou was created, till iniquity was found in thee." Ezekiel 28:13-15. His heart was lifted up with pride (verse 17), and his spirit was slowly embittered with envy. He resented his subservience to God and His law, and resentment gradually developed into open rebellion. This tragedy is briefly described by Isaiah, who asks: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! Thou has said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will be like the most High." Isaiah 14:12-14.

God did not create a devil. He created Lucifer, noble and perfect. Having a free will, Lucifer succumbed to pride, and eventually chose the way of rebellion, enlisting one-third of the angels on his side.