

## 7. THE ANGELS

IN THE HEARTS of millions the materialistic spirit of this age has left no room for the holy angels of God. Strange legends and superstitious stories about angels handed down from the Middle Ages have driven some away from Bible teaching on this subject. Consequently angels have been relegated almost to the same category as the ghost. Like the Sadducees of old many churchmen declare that there is neither angel nor spirit. (Acts 23:8.) In denying the existence of the holy angels, they have impoverished their souls.

Those who believe in the Holy Bible must believe in the holy angels. It is filled with accounts of their exploits. The Holy Scriptures tell us more about angels than about baptism, the Lord's Supper, the holy Sabbath, the Christian church, and many other important subjects. Yet how few sermons we hear on the subject of angels! The number of the angels is said to be so great that our earthly arithmetic is inadequate to count them. The "angels round about the throne" are "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" (Revelation 5:11), "an innumerable company" (Hebrews 12:22).

Who are the angels? Where did they come from? According to Scripture, angels were created by God. They existed before death ever entered this world. We find them at the gate of Paradise with a "sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." (Genesis 3:24.) Since angels lived before the first man died, they are not the spirits of the dead, but holy beings created by God. They are of a higher order than man, for of man it is said, "Thou has made him a little lower than the angels." Psalm 8:5.

Let us now take a look at the ministry of angels in regard to Jesus' birth. The angel Gabriel was sent from God to the little town of Nazareth. There he announced the birth of Jesus to the blessed virgin Mary. "And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women." "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name JESUS." Luke 1: 28, 31. Not only was the birth of Jesus announced by an angel but He was also named by an angel. (Luke 2:21.) And when His birth actually took place, it was announced by an angel to the frightened shepherds in these words: "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us." Luke 2:10, 11, 13-15.

The angels of God had a great deal to do with the ministry of Jesus too. An angel announced the birth of His cousin John, who was to prepare the way before Him. (Luke 1:11-19.) After the silent years in His Nazareth home our Savior appeared on the banks of the Jordan River to be baptized of John. Here, at His own request, He received the holy ordinance. (Matthew 3:13-17.) Immediately after His baptism He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. There He fasted forty days and forty nights and met the great tempter victoriously. Exhausted from the terrible conflict, the Son of God was not left alone in His hour of need, for we read, "Angels came and ministered unto him." Matthew 4: 11. It is of interest to note that there are at least seventeen passages in the New Testament in which Jesus speaks of the angels and their ministry for men.

It was the belief of the early Christians that every believer has a guardian angel, an angel appointed by God to watch over, guide, and care for him from childhood to the grave. Of this wonderful truth Jesus declared in Matthew 18: 10, 11: "Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones [speaking of those who believe in Him-His children, and evidently, especially the boys and girls whom He had just mentioned in verse three]; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost."

Think of it! Our guardian angels may actually look upon the face of God. To our Father in heaven they may report the doings of men on earth, the treatment that they mete out to the innocent and the weak, especially to the followers of Christ. Through their ministry heaven is brought very near to the daily life of God's earthly children. It matters not where duty may lead us -through the crowded streets of business, in moments of relaxation, in the house of sickness or death, in palace or in cottage, at home or abroad everywhere the child of faith is found, there these heavenly beings are present.

The early Christians firmly believed in guardian angels. When King Herod cast the Apostle Peter into prison intending to bring him forth to execution, an angel delivered him in the night, although he was bound with chains between two guards. In answer to the prayers of his fellow Christians, the Lord sent His

angel and saved the apostle from what seemed certain death. After leaving the prison, he went immediately to the house where the believers were met together in prayer. When he knocked at the door, a young girl named Rhoda came to listen. "And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel." Acts 12:14, 15. Here we have proof that the early Christians believed in guardian angels. They could not believe that Peter himself had been released from prison. That was too good to be true! Although they were praying for his deliverance, they thought it must be his angel at the gate. It was not their belief that his angel was some disembodied spirit, because they knew that Peter was still in prison and was not to be executed until after the Passover.

The Jewish people of those days believed in the ministry of heavenly angels. They claimed the wonderful promise of Psalm 91:11,12: "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." And also they had the assurance of Psalm 34:7 that "the angel of the Lord encamps round about them that fear him, and delivers them."

These promises were fulfilled more than once. For example, Satan could not afflict the patriarch Job as long as God's hedge of protection was about him and all that he had. (Job 1:6, 8-12.) Then there was the occasion when the king of Syria sent his armies to surround the city of Dothan, in which the prophet Elisha and his servant were living. The latter cried out in fear, but God's prophet knew whom he served, and had the assurance that the angels of the Lord were about them. There was a great Syrian army encamped about the city, but the angels of God who were encamping about His true servants were more than all the hosts of the enemy. To the servant's despairing question, Elisha replied, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.... And 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 6:16, 17. What a beautiful picture this is of God's protecting care!

No doubt you have seen the beautiful painting of two children walking hand in hand over a dangerous path on a precipitous mountainside. They are almost on the edge of a great cliff which seems to drop down to unknown depths. On the other side of the path are rocks, trees, and flowers. One of the children is reaching out for a butterfly, apparently unmindful of the danger before him. The other is reaching for wayside flowers. Behind them, with hands outstretched toward both, is an angel of God. How symbolic this is of the care and watchfulness of the guardian angels! It was said in more ancient days of faith, that angels have two offices: Superius canere et inferius vigilare-"To sing above and watch beneath." The angels do not guard and watch over God's children simply because they are commanded to; they have a tender love for them.

Jesus said that the angels are interested in man's salvation: "I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents." Luke 15: 10. No gift to God will make such joy among the holy angels in heaven as the gift of a human heart. Why do we not repent of our sins this very day and set those angel choirs rejoicing? But not only does our repentance bring joy to the angels of God, our confession of Christ before men is known to them also. Jesus said: "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: but he that denies me before men shall be denied before the angels of God." Luke 12:8, 9.

In one of D. L. Moody's evangelistic meetings a little Norwegian boy stood up and came to the front. Trembling and with tears trickling down his cheeks, he said in his limited English, "If I tell the world about Jesus, He will tell the Father about me." That was all he said, but it was all he needed to say. Those few words went right to the heart of everyone present that day. If we tell the world-that's the condition-Jesus will confess us to God before the angels of heaven.

We need to remember that it is not only by our public confession of Christ in a religious meeting that we bring joy to the angels but in our everyday life itself, for it is

"Not merely in the words you say,  
Not merely in the deed confessed;  
But in the most unconscious way,  
Is Christ confessed."

But there is also a dark side to what Jesus said about angels. Not only does He speak of the angels of God, those "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Hebrews 1: 14), but He speaks also of evil angels, "the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41.) It is quite clear from

Scripture that approximately one third of the heavenly host fell into sin and rebellion with Satan, himself a mighty angel who was cast down to this earth. We read in Revelation 12:7-9: "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceives the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."

These fallen angels are spoken of in the New Testament as demons. Their opposition to our Savior was manifested all through His earthly ministry. They recognized Him and cried out, "I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God." "Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" Luke 4:34; Matthew 8:29.

It is these fallen angels, "the wandering bandits of the spirit world," as Carlyle B. Haynes calls them, who are the spirits of spiritism, impersonating our dead, teaching doctrines of demons, and preparing for the final conflict of the day of God.

Their destiny has been settled forever, as we read in 2 Peter 2:4: "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment-; or as is stated in other words in Jude 6: "The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." And that day hastens on apace.

Jesus said that holy angels of God will have an important part to play in the final scenes of this world's history. Matthew 13:24-30 portrays the Savior's great parable of the harvest. He tells of a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while he slept the enemy sowed tares. When the seeds sprang up, his servants reported that tares had come up in the field with the wheat. The sower declared this to be the work of an enemy. Then the servants asked whether they should go and gather up the tares. His answer was, "Nay; lest while you gather the tares, you root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather you together first the tares, and bind them into bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn." Verses 29, 30.

Then we have our Lord's own explanation of this parable: "He that sows the good seed is the Son of man [that is, Himself]; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Verses 37-43.

Notice, the reapers of the final harvest are the angels. They are the ones who separate the righteous from the unrighteous. This is done in connection with the second appearing of Christ in glory. "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Matthew 24:30, 31.

Are you one of the elect, one of God's children, one of the redeemed? If so, you will have something to do with the angels on that day. Notice, "He shall send his angels... and they shall gather together his elect." The angels of God, our unseen protectors and guides; the angels, who have at times appeared in the humble guise of men and walked this earth-for the Scripture says that "some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2)-will in that day be revealed in heavenly glory.

And what a glory that is! When an angel appeared to Daniel in vision, the prophet fell at his feet as dead. "Neither is there breath left in me," he said. (Daniel 10: 17. ) When an angel appeared at the garden tomb on the morning of Christ's resurrection, "there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men." Matthew 28:24. The glory and power of just one angel shook the earth and smote the soldier guard to the ground. What will it be when the heavens are filled with those radiant heavenly forms and the Savior comes with all the holy angels-"ten thousand times ten thousand [a hundred million], and thousands of thousands"?

So we see that the birth, life, ministry, atoning sacrifice, resurrection, and second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ are all accompanied by angel ministry, and that the redemption of this world involves

"things which the angels desire to look into." ( 1 Peter 1: 12. ) Yes, Jesus said much about the angels, and we should seek to know more about their holy ministries.

"Hark! hark! my soul, angelic songs are swelling  
O'er earth's green fields and ocean's wave-beat shore;  
How sweet the truth those blessed strains are telling,  
Of that new life when sin shall be no more!

"Angels, sing on! your faithful watches keeping,  
Sing us sweet fragments of the songs above,  
Till morning's joy Shall end the night of weeping,  
And life's long shadows break in cloudless love.

"Angels of Jesus, angels of light,  
Singing to welcome the pilgrims of the night."  
R W. Faber.

## **BIBLE SUMMARY**

Angels have a duty in heaven as well as on earth. 'I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.' Revelation 5: 11. The Apostle Paul declares that their number is innumerable. "But you 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.

### **Did angels exist before the death of any of the human race?**

"So he [God] drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims." Genesis 3:24. Cherubim are an order of angels.

### **Have angels ever appeared as men and partaken of the hospitality of earthly homes?**

"And he [Abraham] took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat." Genesis 18:8. "And he [Lot] made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat." Genesis 19:3. The context proves that those spoken of here are the angels of God. See also Hebrews 13:2.

### **How have angels ministered to God's children?**

Angels have delivered God's children in times of trouble. '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,' were the words of Daniel when he was cast into the lions' den. Daniel 6:22. See also 2 Kings 6:8-17; Acts 12:5-11.

Elijah was fed by an angel in a time of crisis. "And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God." 1 Kings 19:7, 8.

### **Does the Scripture speak of the character, power, and work of the angels?**

"His angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word." Psalm 103:20.

A teacher was explaining the obedience of the angels to God's commandments, saying that they are God's ministers that do His pleasure and that they hearken to His commandments. Then she asked the question, "How do the angels carry out God's will?"

Many answers followed. One child answered, "They do it with all their heart." Another said, "They do it at once." Someone else replied, "They do it well." After a pause, a little girl added, "They do it without any questions."

### **What did Jacob see in his dream at Bethel?**

"And 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. This shows that earth and heaven are connected by the ministry of angels.

Do the angels hear what we say?

"Better is it that thou should not vow, than that thou should vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thy hands?" Ecclesiastes 5:5, 6.

Someone has said, "Christians who live in the light of God's countenance are always accompanied by unseen angels, and these holy beings leave behind them a blessing in our homes." Who protected Daniel in the lions' den?

"My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me." Daniel 6:22.

"What we call physical law is no obstruction to angelic ministrations. Bolts and bars and prison gates disappear at their volition, and dungeons like palaces shine in their presence. No place can be so dismal, no cavern so deep and dark, no Inquisition cell so hidden and fetid, no fortress so strongly guarded, that they cannot find quick and easy access, if a child of God is there."-E. A. Stockman, Footprints of Angels in Fields of Revelation, pp. 74,75.

"He that overcomes...I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." Revelation 3:5.