

The Ministry of Angels

1. What are Angels?

Gilbert Grierson, Knocknacloy, N. Ireland

...there was an angel touching him...(I Kgs.19:5)

Perhaps the title for this opening article of a series about angels might well have been 'Who are angels?' Angels are described in Scripture in ways we would normally associate with personality, as when Elijah was visited, touched and given strengthening food by an angel sent from God. On other occasions they are referred to as looking, hearing, obeying, speaking and worshipping: all actions we would regard as expressions of personality. They are part of the spiritual world created by God:

"Who makes His angels winds (spirits NKJV), And His ministers a flame of fire (Heb.1:7)

They are not comprised of body, soul and spirit like mankind, but are ministering spirits. They are neither male nor female in gender (Matt.22:30), but can take on the outward appearance of men, as their appearances to both men and women in the Scriptures testify.

Nor of course are they divine in nature, being neither omnipotent nor omniscient. The worship of angels is improper (Col.2:18). They have been created by God to serve Him in fulfilment of His purposes, at times being given unique roles to fulfil, as when *a multitude of the heavenly host* appeared to the Bethlehem shepherds, *praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased* (Lk.2:13:14). In his first chapter the writer to the Hebrews contrasts the pre-eminence of the Lord Jesus' Name, and His relationship to God and His work, to the status of the angels. In verse fourteen he precisely describes their

nature and an aspect of their work on behalf of redeemed mankind: *Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?*

As we learn more about angels in this series, we should be increasingly thankful to God that, having saved us by grace, He has also provided this angelic ministry for our support.

Angels, like mankind, have a moral aspect to their nature, and are capable of obedience or disobedience, of subjection or rebellion, as shown by Jude 1:6 and 2 Pet.2:4. The nature of the rebellion against God revealed by these scriptures will also be considered in this series. In that connection Satan is prominent, for he also is an angelic being, constantly seeking to thwart God's purposes. It is vital to know our enemy in this battle in which we are continually engaged.

It would appear that angels were serving in God's presence when the foundations of the earth were laid, for Job 38:7 records that *the sons of God* then all shouted for joy. Do they die? No! they are immortal beings (Lk.20:36) and will live eternally in their allotted destiny: according to Jude 1:6 certain rebellious angels are already being *kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day*.

There is one characteristic of angels that we might seek reverently to reproduce in ourselves - that of being flame-like in our worship and service. In his vision Isaiah heard the seraphim call to one another,

*Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of Hosts,
The whole earth is full of His glory.* (Isa.6:3)

With what fervour they proclaimed God's glory! How grieved the Holy Spirit must be if the worship of God's people should at times be lukewarm and formal. One of the seraphim seen by Isaiah touched the prophet's mouth with a burning coal taken from the altar, bringing cleansing and forgiveness (Isa.6:6,7). If only we, as flames of fire, could reach out and touch the hearts of those around us through the gospel! What joy this would bring to the heart of the Lord of the harvest, who has entrusted to us, not to angels, His message of salvation for proclamation to all mankind.

Make me Thy fire, flame of God (Amy Carmichael).

We trust that this series of articles on angels will help us to step into their world to the extent that God allows this, through the study of His Word, helped by the Holy Spirit. As a result a sense of awe at His holiness and greatness may be deepened, enhancing our worship and other aspects of our service.

Like Elijah, we too need a touch from God!

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3. Fallen Angels

Michael Elliott, Manchester, England

When referring to faith and works James says, *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble!* (Jas.2:19); the thought behind the word being to bristle, shudder or fear. As we begin to look at our subject of fallen angels we ask, "How did the demons, referred to by James and the host of other fallen angelic creatures come to such a situation as to be terrified when acknowledging the power and authority of God?" It is true of them as said of others, *"How the mighty have fallen!"* (2 Sam.1:19). It is a profound subject we are looking at and, whilst Scripture provides some detail, other aspects are far beyond our understanding.

Satan and all angels were created by God. Ps.148:5 tells us. *Let them (the angels) praise the name of the LORD, for He commanded and they were created.* They were created perfect and holy for the purpose of worshipping God and serving as His servants and messengers.

Lucifer and his sin

Satan, sometimes called 'Lucifer', was created having unparalleled glory and beauty. In summary we read (in Ezek.28:15): *"You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created...".* Yet the final part of the verse records the solemn words, *"...till iniquity was found in you."*

How could it be that such a perfect and magnificent created being, as described in these verses, could and did sin? This is indeed a profound question beyond human reasoning but a second portion in the Old Testament, Isa.14, provides some help. This portion seems to have dual application referring both to the fall of the king of Babylon and that of Lucifer.

There are five 'I will' phrases in verses 13-14 which indicate the reason for, and the nature of, Satan's rebellion. *I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.*' Satan's motives and intentions are perfectly clear and God's judgment is equally clear, *"Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit"* (Isa.14:15).

Consequence

Satan was cast out of God's presence along with the multitudes of angels that had joined him in his rebellion. It is possible that perhaps a third of the angelic beings joined Satan in his heavenly rebellion (see Rev.12:4). Not only were they removed from heaven, they all lost their original holiness becoming corrupt in nature and conduct (Matt.10:1; Lk.7:21; Eph.6:1 1-12). Not all the fallen angels were free to roam this earth. Some are in prison awaiting God's judgment, being cast down to hell (Tartarus) and held in chains until the day of judgment (2 Pet.2:4). Jude 6 represents their sin as of leaving their own principality and proper habitation. Other fallen angels are active demons who serve their master and whose end too will be the Lake of Fire. They oppose God and His purposes at every stage.

Demon activity on earth

Without a doubt there was increased demonic activity during the time of the Lord's ministry on earth. It is seen at the time when Satan came to tempt the Lord (Lk.4:1-13) but right through the Lord's life Satan was actively working through individuals and circumstances in an attempt to hinder Him.

There are many references in the gospels to people being possessed by demons. How the Lord's heart went out to such in all their need when He commanded the unclean demons to come out from them! The Lord was always in complete control and the demons always had to do as He instructed. Whatever their power and work presently, we know that they will be judged by their Creator. We refer to the powerful words spoken by the Lord concerning the eternal destiny of Satan and his angels in Matt.25:41: *'...the everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels'*. A salutary thought confirmed by the words of Rev.20:10. Little wonder, *the demons believe - and tremble.*

Victory assured

For the fallen angels there can be no forgiveness. We, by contrast, have come to know God's forgiveness through the death of Christ. So, although we face a fearful adversary, be thankful he and his angels are indeed our enemy not our friend and that God through Christ has made every provision for our victory.

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4. Ordainers of the Law

Stephen Hickling, Birmingham, England

The presence of angels at the giving of the Law seems to be unquestionable on the basis of the scriptural record. References to the Lord coming from Sinai and coming *from the midst of ten thousand holy ones* (Deut.33:2) and to the thousands upon thousands of God's chariots, which *the Lord is among...as at Sinai* (Ps.68:17) leave us with little doubt in the matter. Neither should we be surprised at the presence of the angelic hosts on such an occasion as this, given their interest in the affairs of men, examples of which abound in Scripture.

It is only in the New Testament, however, that we learn of the ministry of angels in ordaining the Law. In Gal.3:19, Paul speaks of the Law as, *having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator*. The word 'ordained', in this instance, simply means arranged, administered, put in operation or proclaimed. In his defence before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:53), Stephen also makes mention of the fact that the Law was received by the arrangement (the noun deriving from the verb translated 'ordained' in Gal.3:19) of angels.

Paul clarifies the nature of the ministry of angels with regard to the introduction of the Law in Heb.2:2, where he refers to the Law as *the word spoken through angels*. In the disposition of the Law at Sinai the angels were, it seems, God's mouthpiece. They were the agents through which God's Law was delivered by the hand (margin) of a mediator (Gal.3:19) to God's covenant people.

But why were angels tasked with this tremendous responsibility of proclaiming the Law to God's people

through Moses, the mediator? We do not know whether the angelic throng was visible to the people, but in arranging this exhibition of divine power at the institution of His Law, it seems that God had His people's frailties in mind. Whether or not the host was witnessed by the people, its presence at Sinai was accepted in Jewish tradition. Indeed, the Jewish historian Josephus writes that 'for ourselves, we have learned from God the most excellent of our doctrines, and the most holy part of our Law, by angels or ambassadors' (Antiquities XV.5.3). Josephus was making reference to the Greek philosophy that ambassadors were sacred when carrying messages to others. The implication in his remarks regarding angels is that, for the Jew, the Law derived a sacred authority by virtue of it being delivered from God by angels or divine ambassadors.

Stephen's words in Acts 7:53 also point toward a Jewish regard for the authority of the Law because of the involvement of angels in its delivery. The word translated 'by' in the phrase *you who received the law as ordained by angels* refers to the consideration that influences somebody to do something. Stephen was essentially saying that Israel received the Law, being influenced by the authority of the ordaining angels or thinking it their duty to receive what angels were administering.

Israel's mediator was not one who could lay his hands upon both parties (see Job 9:33) and God knew that the people would constantly question his position and God's choice of him. It seems that God purposed the involvement of angels in the giving of the Law, recognising His people's weakness, so that the authority of such Law would be without doubt.

We must, however, remember that this was God's Law. It did not originate with the angels; they merely spoke the words that God had given to them. Indeed, a distortion of this truth seems to be at the root of the Colossian heresy, which encouraged angel worship and, according to F. F. Bruce, characterized angelic powers as the elemental spirits of the universe (see Paul's references to the *elementary principles of the world* in Col.2:8, 20 and Gal.4:3, 9 - these were the rudimentary principles of the Jewish faith that ensnared the adherents to this heresy, whose regard for them seems to stem from their connection with angelic powers).

The apostle's words in Heb.2:5 may have been directed at those who were being enticed to return to observance of the elementary principles of Judaism because of a corrupt regard for the authority of angels. He reminds them that God *did not subject to angels the world to come*. Delivery of the Law by the mouths of angels gave good reason for Israel to pay close attention to it. How much more so then should the word which we have received, *at the first spoken through the Lord* (Heb.2:3), cause us to pay much closer attention to it?

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5. Angels & Individuals

Martin Jones, Toronto, Canada

'God only knows the times my life was threatened just today.
A reckless car ran out of gas before it ran my way.
Near misses all around me, accidents unknown,
Though I never see with human eyes the hands that lead me home.
But I know they're all around me - all day and through the night.
When the enemy is closing in, I know sometimes they fight...
Got His angels watching over me, every move I make,
Angels watching over me!'

Are these lyrics by Christian musician Amy Grant pure imagination or sound theology? Can we really expect that angels get involved in our everyday lives - and, if so, how?

Heb.1:14 asks the rhetorical question, *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?* It seems clear that the involvement of angels (the 'good' angels at least) with humanity is never at their own volition, but as God's agents. They may be asked to **publish** God's Word and **protect** God's chosen people, individually and collectively -and if this was so in Bible times, then there is no reason to think they don't do that today.

Throughout Scripture, a key angelic role is to announce impending events, either good or bad, that will affect humans. For example, angels were present at the advance notice given to Abraham concerning the destruction of Sodom. In the New Testament

angels again are the agents of revelation - for example to Joseph (Matt.1:20) and Mary (Lk.1:26) concerning Jesus' birth.

Protection is also a recurring theme on different levels. Nationally, God sent an angel to protect the Hebrew people after their exodus from Egypt, to lead them to the promised land, and to destroy the hostile tribes in their way (Ex.23:20; Num.20:16). He also sent an angel to kill some 185,000 Assyrians in one night to get Hezekiah out of a very sticky situation (2 Kgs.19).

But special guardianship of modest, humble individuals is also promised: *For He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways* (Ps.91:11). Elijah certainly found that to be true at Beersheba, where vital bread and water were provided, as well as a rare word of angelic concern (1 Kgs.19).

"See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven" (Matt.18:10). It is mind-blowing to think that even the tiniest baby has his or her very own 'superhero' - such is the value placed on every soul by God.

In the New Testament, an angel put Peter's guards to sleep, released him from his chains, and led him out of prison. What an experience! Ironically, the praying church teased poor Rhoda that it must be Peter's angel at the door and not Peter (Acts 12:15)!

Angels are prominent in the Book of Revelation and the angels of the seven churches of Asia Minor are mentioned in Rev.1-3. Some commentators speculate that they are guardian angels, having the same relationship to the churches as the angel-princes in Daniel would have to the nations (Dan.10:12-13; Dan.12:1). We do know from 1 Cor.11 that angels witness the church in operation, but we can't be dogmatic as to any wider function. Regardless, it's humbling to think that we as humans will one day judge the angels who currently watch over us (see 1 Cor.6:3) - on what basis, and for what purpose, will be revealed some day.

The Bible does not appear to be explicit on the opinion of angels about men. It's not hard to infer that they themselves are dispassionate towards the human race, given their apparent lack of emotion towards us in the Biblical record. We surely could not blame them if they were in some sense puzzled by all of God's tender and long-suffering dealings with man - *what is man that you are mindful of him?* (Ps.8:4).

We do know though that whatever services they provide reflect, and are due to, the overwhelming love and concern for humanity shown by their Master - the One who was for a while made a little lower than the angels.

(All Bible quotations are from the NIV)

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6. The Ministry of Angels to the Lord

Karl Smith, Buckhaven, Scotland

Angels were closely involved with the Lord Jesus' life of service on this earth, from before His birth to after His return into heaven. After they announced His coming (Matt.1:20-23; Lk.1:26-38; 2:9-15), they spoke twice more to Joseph (Matt.2:13,19) to make sure He was protected from the evil that Herod was plotting against Him. The family were warned to escape to Egypt and informed that they could safely come back to Nazareth once the king was dead.

The angels would have considered it a great honour to be involved in protecting their Lord. Satan quoted the promise of Ps.91 to provoke the Lord into displaying His power prematurely: *"He will command his angels concerning you...On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone."* (Matt.4:6).

They would indeed have been delighted to rush to His aid rather than see their Creator come to any harm, but He had not come to promote His cause by a grand self-advertising gesture like this. That particular call for help never came.

At the end of His temptations in the desert, however, angels were allowed to help Him: *Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him* (Matt.4:11).

It is the nature of angels to serve. The writer to the Hebrews asks, *Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?* (Heb.1:14) Apart from Satan and his fallen

angels, they do not consider it beneath their dignity even to serve us, so how glad they must have been to have an opportunity of serving their Lord? What they did to help Him is not spelled out. After forty days of fasting, He must have been extremely weak physically and perhaps they provided for these needs. How amazing that we too can have this angelic privilege of serving Him like Peter's mother-in-law (Matt.8:15) and the women who provided for Him practically (Lk.8:3)! In a future time those who cater for the hungry and thirsty, clothe the poor and visit the sick and imprisoned will be reckoned to have ministered to Him (Matt.25:44).

Luke's Gospel records another touching moment of angelic service in the Garden of Gethsemane: *And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him.* (Lk.22:43)

If ever He needed strength it was at this moment. He had been thinking of the horrors that awaited Him next day at the cross and it had had a strong physiological effect on Him, as mental suffering so often does. This was so intense that His sweat fell like great drops of blood (Lk.22:44). The word for strengthened is used in only one other place in the New Testament, when Saul, after the weakness of his conversion experience, took food and was strengthened (Acts 9:19). Perhaps the angels again provided the means of physical refreshment in this traumatic time. At any rate, they were there serving while even His closest disciples slept (Lk.22:45).

Later that night they were waiting to protect Him again. Imagine their anger as they watched evil men laying their hands on the Lord Jesus to take Him roughly away to a blasphemous, rigged trial and a shameful death. Peter's sword was perhaps not the only one drawn; the armies of heaven must have been longing to intervene, poised to strike, just waiting for the word to unleash their fury at this outrageous injustice. He Himself asked: *"Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled...?"* (Matt.26:53-54).

Once again, the call never came. He had a purpose in going to the cross and nothing was going to prevent Him from fulfilling it. He was going to Calvary to die for your sins and mine and there was no way He was going to draw upon this special help, to which He was completely entitled. He did not have to die in our place: He entered into it willingly because of His great love for us. Praise God for the times He sent His angels to care for His Son, just as He sends them to care for our needs throughout our lives. But praise God even more for the time He did not send them, because that's when we see His care for us most clearly in action.

(Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version.)

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7. Angels as associated with the House of God

Jim Bell, Vancouver, Canada

It is, perhaps, too simple or self-gratifying to feel that those who are in the house of God are its only privileged associates. Scripture teaches plainly that angels do have an integral role in regard to this House. Angels have background links to God's people, connections to the Old Testament House, as well as associations with the New Testament House.

In many Old Testament scriptures there is mention of the 'Angel of the Lord'. It is apparent that in some instances this may refer directly to deity although in other places a messenger of deity, acting in the name of deity, may be understood to be involved. We will not make this point for each of the citations in this short article, and trust readers will accept that applying references to the Angel of the Lord is not in any way intended to detract from the possibility that deity is directly or indirectly in view.

As early as in the life of Isaac, God intended a role for angels in the initiation of His people. In Gen.24:7 the search for Isaac's wife involved a role that angels could play in prospering the search, and by extension the creation of God's people. Furthermore, in Jdgs.2:1-4, we learn that God used angels as one way to address His people. As we delve deeper into this medium of communication, we also see that at the burning bush, Moses met an angel directing him to God's people in Egypt. Because of that angelic message, Moses initiated their escape. After this escape was effected, God used angels to assist in the deliverance of the Law. Ps.68:17 infers that there

were angelic thousands at Sinai, presumably as Moses was receiving the tablets of the Law, verifiable from Deut.33:2 when Moses said, " *the Lord came from Sinai...He shone forth from Mount Paran and he came from the midst of 10,000 holy ones.*" Also, Gal.3:19 teaches that the Law was ordained through angels, the reference acting as proof of the integral role which angels played. Zechariah (Zech.1:14) tells that the angels told him that God was jealous for Zion; angels, as messengers, worked as a link between God and His people. Finally, Daniel (Dan.8:13) hears the 'holy ones' discussing when visions for the future will be fulfilled. Daniel had seen how important the angels are in their association with the house of God.

Apart from these general references about the association of angels with God's people, these holy ones also played a role in the initiation, the establishment, and even the physical function of the tabernacle. In addition to their presence during the Exodus (Ex.14:19), the images of angelic beings were constantly before the eyes of the priests entering the tabernacle. On the curtains of the tabernacle the skilful men wove cherubim into the linen, with the blue and purple and scarlet; these embroidered images of angels were on these curtains and on the veil (except for the entrance curtain). The people would also know that on the Ark of the Covenant, cherubim/angels looked constantly on the mercy seat (Ex.25:17-20). Not only in the tabernacle, but also in the temple were these angels featured. Isaiah speaks of seeing and hearing the Seraphim, and Ezekiel speaks of living beings with four faces/wings (Isa.1:4-13). God wished that His people would have these holy ones before their minds to create a tangible reminder of Himself.

Moving into the New Testament, we see the importance of the association of angels in the house of God. Peter confirms that the gospel was sent from heaven and that even angels desire to look into it. In Acts 8:26, we see a specific sample of an angel's role in the furtherance of the gospel. It was an angel who sent Philip to meet the Ethiopian eunuch prior to the latter's baptism. Arriving at Revelation, we read of the angels of the churches. Who these angels are is not entirely certain. Some feel that they are heavenly beings; others feel they are symbolic of overseers. Even in the functioning of a church of God, the angels play their role. We learn in 1 Cor.11:10 that women in a church are to wear their head coverings *because of the angels*. Finally, there is the heavenly tabernacle/heavenly Jerusalem (Heb.12:22) which the holy ones surround; the same image is presented in Rev.5:2; Rev.8:2 when John sees them around the heavenly throne.

From this short study, we, as saints in God's house, can deduce that we are not alone. The angels have undoubtedly a direct association with us.

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8. Watchers from on High

David Woods, Manchester, England

King Nebuchadnezzar received a vision from God in which he foresaw his own humbling (Dan.4). Only Daniel, so in tune with God in every area of his life, could provide the interpretation. The vision introduced an interesting heavenly 'agent', referred to as an 'angelic watcher' (Dan.4:13,23), one member of what would seem to be an unnumbered office of angels (Dan.4:17).

This holy one, as he is described, had the responsibility to pass on the "*decree...decision...command*" of "*the angelic watchers...the holy ones*" relating to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan.4:17). It is important to say here that we cannot for a moment infer that angels, of any rank or position, could ever make decisions relating to the destiny of any human being. Only God is sovereign, and only He can make such decisions.

It's interesting to trace the original Aramaic word used for 'watcher', which is only found in Dan.4, to root words which indicate 'the opening of the eyes' or 'to be awake'. We might think of those never-resting heavenly beings covered with eyes that are described for us in Revelation and Ezekiel. Angels are beings that do not sleep, always awake to obey the command of God whilst at the same time appearing to pay close attention to what is happening on earth. 'Watcher' brings in to view both aspects of angels' service, namely, attentiveness to every order from God and the immediate reaction to any such commands, and attentiveness to the welfare of humans on earth.

Scriptures such as Ps.103:20-21, *Bless the LORD, you His angels, mighty in strength, who perform His*

word, obeying the voice of His word! Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, you who serve Him, doing His will, and Heb.1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? lend weight to this dual role of angels.

When Job 1:6 (*there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD*) is considered alongside Dan.4 we might learn that heavenly councils are convened where omniscient God would seem to discuss the affairs of men with assembled angelic watchers. These are then tasked with the responsibility to fulfil His commands and make His will known to men. Isn't it a wonderful thing to consider that these always-watching angelic beings can discuss our individual circumstances and situations with God, and maybe to some extent (like men & women through prayer), 'influence' God's decision-making process in the course of their meetings with Him?

When the apostle John saw an angel during his wonderful vision recorded in Revelation, he fell down to worship. The angel replied, *"Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets."* (Rev.22:9). Now we have a fuller appreciation of the work of these watchers, who consider themselves as working alongside us in our service for God. It's a great source of comfort and strength to any dedicated servant of God to know that these remarkable heavenly beings are involved so closely in our work for God, assisting us as we daily attempt to understand the will of God and act in accordance with it. Luke makes reference to the strengthening the Lord Jesus received from an angel as He contemplated the horror of Calvary; it would seem that we can know similar strengthening from angels as they minister to us the things that God has decreed.

Paul could write, *we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men* (1 Cor.4:9). How the heavenly watchers must have looked on with astonishment at the hardships and the great persecution the apostles endured for their faith in their Saviour! Angels know Christ as their Creator and Lord, but not as Saviour. We serve Christ because we love Him for His atoning sacrifice, because He first loved us, because He is our Saviour. The outworking of our love and devotion today (which may result in hardship, loneliness and persecution) is still a spectacle for these beings. How these angels must rejoice with God as they view redeemed lives dedicated to serving the Master, and are directly involved in the support and care of the saints of God.

We are never alone in our service for God, someone is always watching!

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9. *Spiritual Wrestling*

Alex Reid, Leigh, England

How do we define spiritual wrestling? What has spiritual wrestling got to do with angels? Is there a link between the two? Does our spiritual wrestling have an effect beyond our world?

Perhaps the most enduring Biblical image of a wrestler is that of Jacob and his wrestling match at the Jabbok River. It was there that he prevailed with God and secured the blessing he sought (Gen.32:22-31). Although this was a physical experience, leaving its lasting mark in Jacob's body, it was also a spiritual experience, teaching Jacob reliance on God rather than his own wits. This famous wrestling match is often used as an apt illustration of persevering in prayer.

The New Testament also establishes a link with spiritual struggle or wrestling and persevering in prayer: *For our struggle (wrestling) is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places....With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance...(Eph.6:12-18)*. Who are these spiritual forces of wickedness that the apostle alludes to, against whom the believer must wrestle in prayer?

The experience of another Old Testament character, Daniel the prophet, casts some light on this question. In Dan.10 we learn something about the nature of these unseen forces. A respected Christian writer offers the following comment on Dan.10: '...creation is divided, as it appears, into a number of provinces, the material and spiritual organization of

which is entrusted to a definite angel prince as, so to speak, the viceroy of God. Thus there are angels for...whole lands and nations, as Persia (Dan.10:13), Greece (Dan.10:20), Israel (Dan.10:21; Dan.12:1). This assumes that in the world of light as also in the world of darkness there are angel organizations, which wield power in certain regions and hold ranks differing according to the size of the respective areas'.¹

Dan.10 also implies a correlation between the prayers of a godly man and events in the unseen angelic sphere. The chapter sees Daniel engaged in a three week long exercise of prayer and fasting. At the conclusion of the three weeks an angel appears to him in response to his prayer. Although we are not specifically told the subject of the prophet's prayers, the angel's message to Daniel implies that it was concerning God's plans for the future of the people of Israel, for the message takes in the sweep of human history from Daniel's day through to the events of the end times, particularly as it affects the Israel nation. The angel explains to Daniel that, from the first day of his prayer exercise, he, the angel, was dispatched to Daniel with a vision. The three week delay in the angel fulfilling his mission was due to opposition from the Prince of Persia. The Prince of Persia was another angelic being who stood opposed to the purposes of God. Since the period of delay experienced by the angelic messenger corresponds exactly with the length of Daniel's prayer vigil, it suggests a correlation between Daniel's prayer and the angel's victory over the Prince of Persia. So things prayed for on earth have an effect in the heavens.

If we are to secure the blessings we seek in our earthly spiritual service, we must first overcome the unseen opposition. In the example of Daniel we can see that this conflict is entered into through prayer. Having described the panoply of spiritual armour with which the believer is equipped - both defensive and offensive - Paul sounds the call to arms: *With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition...*(Eph.6:18), for this is how the spiritual struggle is joined.

Two things sustain the spiritual warrior in this conflict: the incomparable armament with which he or she is equipped (see Eph.6:11-17), and the knowledge that the hostile forces are already beaten, for they were defeated by the Christ of Calvary: *He...disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him* (Col.2:15).

What joy to know that we are on the winning side!

(1) Sauer, E., The Dawn of World Redemption

The Ministry of Angels

10. Entertaining Angels

Duncan Hickling, Cromer, England

So far in this series we have been looking at the nature of angelic beings, and some of the things they do. In many of the descriptions of angelic activity described for us in Scripture, it is clear that an angel is involved, on a mission on God's behalf. However, Heb.13:2 instructs us: *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.*

The book of Hebrews opens by emphasizing the proper perspective we should have in considering angels, the messengers of God, as compared to the Son, the last Word of the Father. Jesus is exalted as the radiance of God's Glory (Heb.1:3), whereas of angels it says, *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?* (Heb.1:14) So we are not to seek after the experience of meeting angels, but rather seek the Lord, and accept that angels are servants of God, just as we are (see Rev.22:8,9).

We have only a small number of occasions in Scripture when angels have appeared to men and been 'entertained' by them. The first of these is recorded in Genesis 18, when Abraham was camped by the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he had an altar to the LORD. He lived there with his allies; the men who helped him rescue Lot when he had been taken captive. He was living in the land where God had called him, and kept company with men of integrity. Abraham knew the right way to treat strangers, as he himself was an alien in a foreign land (Gen.17:8)

Abraham firstly notices the three men (as he thought) and determines to show them hospitality. This was normal practice among the nomadic peoples of the

area, but Abraham does so without any reluctance. He hurries to serve them, and provides a generous meal, after refreshing their feet with water. Doesn't it remind us of the Lord Jesus, washing the disciples' feet and sharing a meal with them? And one of these three appears to be the Lord himself, in one of His pre-incarnation appearances! *It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master* (Matt.10:25).

What about us? Are we too proud to put ourselves out in service to others? Abraham was privileged to be able to serve the Lord, without knowing it. Jesus said that when those who have helped the sick, homeless or hungry receive their reward, *The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me'* (Matt.25:40). We may be able to entertain angels unawares, but we should serve men or angels *wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men* (Eph.6:7).

It was not by chance that the angels were there. The word angel literally means 'messenger', and Abraham was to receive a message from the Lord concerning the son to be born to his wife Sarah. As we open our homes to entertain others with a servant heart we must be ready to listen to the voice of God. Let us not be like Martha, who was distracted by the many preparations she busied herself with, but rather listen like Mary for the voice of the Lord (Lk.10:38-42).

At some point Abraham realized that before him was the Lord Himself. As the Lord had drawn near to him, so he was able to plead for the people of Sodom. This wicked city was also to receive a visit from the two angels. Their reception by Lot was as it should be, in terms of them being offered the chance to refresh themselves and have a bed for the night. However, Lot's strong insistence may have been because he did not like the idea of them spending the night in the square, knowing as he did the character of the place.

What a contrast! Abraham was dwelling in a wholesome place, a place of worship, and with good companions. Lot had chosen to live side by side with depravity and wickedness. What starts out as simple hospitality becomes ugly, as the mob surround the house, seeking to abuse Lot's guests. The situation deteriorates to such an extent that he even offers his own daughters to the crowd to appease them. In the end the angels have to grab Lot and his wife and daughters and lead them out of the city to safety.

Read again the context of Heb.13:2. Chapter 12 concludes with the exhortation to *worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."* Chapter 13 then encourages us to watch our conduct and teachings carefully. It is in this spirit of holiness, meek service and obedience that we are to 'entertain strangers'. Then we will be ready for anyone, whether it be men, angels, or the Lord Himself! (All quotations are from the NIV.)

The Ministry of Angels

11. Angel of the LORD

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Of all the angelic beings to appear on the pages of Scripture, one stands out as unique. The various appearances of the one introduced in Gen.16:7 as *the Angel of the LORD* reveals one who excels, both in character and person, the created angelic hosts; one so closely connected with the God of heaven as to be indistinguishable, appearing as a visible manifestation of God Himself.

In the very first use of the word angel in the Scriptures, the Angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar as she sat by a spring in the wilderness (Gen.16:7-14). He came with a promise reverberating the divine assurance of progeny which God had made to Abram (Gen.13:16;15:5): *I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude*. This multiplication of Hagar's descendants through Ishmael was a matter of divine purpose to be performed by God (Gen.17:20), yet the promise came from the Angel, on His own account and to be performed by His own determination. Hagar's conviction that she had seen the God who sees, is confirmed by Scripture: it was *the LORD who spoke to her* (Gen.16:13).

The intimate association between the Angel of the Lord and God Himself is not unique to Hagar's experience. On Moriah, Abraham was stayed from the sacrifice of Isaac by the Angel of the Lord, who acknowledged the act of worship being performed towards Him (Gen.22:5,12; see also Jdgs.6:18), something the created orders of angelic beings would never accept (Rev.19:10). Jacob's night-time wrestle with the Angel beside the Jabbok left him with a deep

conviction that he had seen God *face to face* (Gen.32:22-32; Hos.12:3-4), a fact confirmed by the Angel in the meaning behind Jacob's new name (Gen.32:28). Moses too, having been attracted by the Angel of the Lord who appeared in fire out of the bush, approached to hear *God [who] called to him from the midst of the bush* (Ex.3:2,4,6). There, at Horeb, signs were given to Moses to perform before the people *that they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers...has appeared to you* (Ex.4:5), a fact confirmed in Stephen's address to the Council that with singleness of purpose and unity of deity *God sent [Moses] to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush* (Acts 7:35). On a later occasion, Manoah and his wife, in an experience which reflected Gideon's (Jdgs.6:11-24), were left convinced that *we have seen God!* (Jdgs.13:22). They were not dissuaded from this conviction. Indeed, the Angel took to Himself a Messianic name later revealed in Isa.9:6 (Jdgs.13:18) and identified Himself with the offering and its savour, ascending in the flame of the altar (Jdgs.13:20).

The regular identification with deity of the Angel of the Lord (elsewhere referred to as the Angel of God - see Jdgs.13:3,9-13) indicates that this is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ in pre-incarnate manifestation. Identified inseparably with God, we see the mystery of godliness, *God...manifested in the flesh* (1 Tim.3:16), foreshadowed in the pre-incarnate Word appearing as a heavenly Man (Jdgs.13:6) to work the purposes of God amongst men, until the mystery was conclusively revealed when *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us* (Jn 1:14) after which references to the Angel of the Lord cease. Prior to His assumption of eternal humanity (1 Tim.2:5), He came as one sent from the presence of God (Isa.63:9), heralding in type the work which He alone could accomplish when, in the fullness of time, He came to seek and to find (Gen.16:7; Lk.19:10), directing men to God (Jdgs.13:16; Matt.19:17) and giving Himself in sacrifice (Jdgs.13:20; Eph.5:2) to stay the hand of judgment (Gen.22:11-12; Jn 3:17) and redeem a people for God's own possession (Gen.48:16; Col.1:13-14), made righteous (Zech.3:1-4; Phil.3:9) and brought into a covenant owned by Him (Jdgs.2:1-2; Heb.9:16) and demanding their obedience (Ex.23:20-23; Jdgs.2:2; Jn 14:15).

In all these aspects we see the unmistakable and unsurpassable character of Christ shining out from the Angel of the Lord. (Quotations from the NKJV)

Editors' Note: *The Focus feature on the following 2 pages is due to be the last scheduled topical item from the pen of George Prasher. A current affairs type slot will continue with next year's launch of our new quarterly format, but George has expressed a wish to retire from performing this specific task which he has diligently undertaken for over a quarter of a century, always with relevance and penetrating biblical insight. We are sure readers will join us in heartfelt appreciation of a job well done in the Master's service.*