

Jesus and Angels.

Number seven

Our world is shrouded in spiritual darkness. People are searching for God but can't find Him. How can man encounter God? Who can come to Him on his own? No one. The Gospel of John declares, "No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known." (1:18) And that is it. There is no other way to see God and to know Him than through Jesus Christ.

In the fullness of time the Son of God, the light of the world, came to earth. What was not possible to do for angels as created beings, He could accomplish. The central fact of history is the incarnation. Heaven touched earth. God's Son became man. Not angels but Jesus saves. Our relationship with God comes through Jesus and not through angels. He is the source of our strength and the passion of our faith. In our age, dying of spiritual hunger, the Jesus of the Scriptures must be proclaimed with clarity and conviction. The focus of our faith is the grace of God in Christ. The eternal Son of God alone has the power and the will to be Saviour of fallen man.

Angels work behind the stage of history; they are the messengers who prepared the world for the coming of the One who is greater and more glorious than even the mightiest angel. We read in Hebrews 2:5, "It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come." And, "the Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe." (Hebr. 1:2) And the angels form a shield to protect the ministry of our Lord. They are under His rule. Jesus is the center of the angelic world. They are His angels. They belong to Him as He has made them messengers of His plan of redemption. (Hebr. 1:14)

As our Lord's disciples we may not overlook the role of angels in His life. If we neglect their role we dishonour the Lord. How can we confess the reality of Christ without acknowledging the reality of the spiritual world? Our Lord did not accommodate Himself to the thinking of His age while denying the reality of angels. Our Lord, who had been in the presence of angels before His incarnation, obviously accepted their reality and their vitality while serving on earth.

Jesus' earthly ministry heralded an amazing and unusual activity of angels - from beginning to end. And we notice that they never drew attention to themselves, they always pointed to the Saviour. They wanted sinful men to see Jesus as the only hope and Saviour of the world. When God brought his first born into the world, He said, "Let all God's angels worship

him." (Hebr. 1:6) The Gospels repeatedly confront us with appearances of angels. Jesus also had much to say about angels.

A choir of angels welcomed His birth with a hymn of praise to God (Luke 2:13f.) The King has come! The Saviour has finally arrived! Praise be God the Father and His Son! When the life of the infant Jesus was threatened by the wicked and cunning King Herod, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt." (Mat. 2:13) After the excruciating temptation by the devil in the desert an angel came to Jesus and ministered to him. (Mat. 4:11) In the Garden of Gethsemane, facing the betrayal and crucifixion, our Lord agonized in prayer; and His heavenly Father sent an angel from heaven to strengthen Him. (Luke 22:43) Angels appeared at His resurrection and ascension. (Matt. 28:2; Acts 1:11)

Angels and the Second Coming.

Our ascended Lord waits for His Father's signal to return to earth. When He will return, we don't know. Our times are dynamic and fast moving. While we are waiting, the angels are actively engaged in the history of the world. They press victoriously onward to its final consummation when the Lord will come again in the radiance of His glory. In the background of world events we may not forget that the spiritual warfare is being waged. We know that the ultimate victory belongs to the Lord. Yet Satan does his evil utmost to hinder the coming of God's kingdom. But the angels of God are stronger than the forces of Satan. They are even employed in the government of the world. (Dan. 10:22f. -11:1) They never act on their own. They are God's servants, who obey His commands.

God uses the good angels to carry out His justice. They are not cute-little-harmless-winged cherubs but spiritual beings of great powers. God sent an angel to destroy the army of Sennacherib, when he threatened the destruction of Jerusalem (2 Ki. 19:35). An angel killed Herod, in the midst of his pride and persecution. (Act 12)

The work of angels is often mentioned in the book of Revelation; the latter becomes a fantasy if the role of angels in it is denied. The Lord and His angels are making everything ready for His soon return. The devil knows that his times is short. (Rev. 12:12) The angels are under the Lord's command. They do more than burst out in song. They even have been given the task to carry out the judgment of the Lord on the last day of history. Jude 4f. states, "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied . . ." See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone. . . ." There is nothing sentimental about angels. They are God's avengers, zealous for His holiness, who use their great powers to do His will.

When the Lord returns in glory, He will be seen not only as Saviour of the elect but also as judge of the wicked. He will separate people "one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." (Matt. 25:32) And the angels will throw the wicked "into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. 13:41f) Thus when we pray "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20), we are also expecting the angels to leave heaven to accompany the Lamb of God, the Lord of glory, and to carry out His will.

Angels and Election.

Do angels need the Saviour? The angels were created with the ability to choose between good and evil. If this were not so, the revolt in heaven would have been impossible. The angels had an either/or choice. It was a choice for or against God without having a second chance; for God and immediately perfect or against God and immediately totally evil. The angels who chose for Satan became totally evil, joined his army and the warfare against God. The angels who chose for God became His servants. In other words, the angels, who joined Satan's side, are forever lost. Their abode will always be the place of outer darkness - hell. And in their enmity against God the forces of hell attempted to drag the whole human race along to destruction. The prince of darkness began his demonic work right in the beginning of the history of the human race, when he asked Eve, "Did God really say, You must not eat from any tree in the garden?" (Gen. 3:1) Our first parents believed crafty Satan, disobeyed God, and were driven out of paradise. And since the fall the war between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness has been waged on earth.

All the evil, misery, wars, and conflicts we witness today do not just have economic or political causes, they are the devil's final destructive efforts to wreak chaos, to win converts to his cause, and to halt the progress of the Kingdom of God.

The angels, who refused to join Satan in his war against God, remained in the perfect state in which they were created. Unlike human beings, the good angels did not need to be rescued from the depths of sin and despair because they had never fallen into sin. God chose to keep them in His presence. The apostle Paul, therefore, can speak of "the elect angels" who live in sight of God and Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 5:21) And these angels became active in God's wonderful plan of salvation for a fallen world.

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