

## Angels and Our Salvation. Number Eight

Angels do not appear in paradise as Adam and Eve - in their state of innocence - walked in the presence of God. They do not come on the world stage until after Satan's success with Adam and Eve and their fall into sin. God in His great mercy immediately opened heaven and sent His forces to start the rescue operation. These appearances therefore are demonstrations of God's marvelous grace. The Lord uses them to come to the aid of His elect (Hebr. 1:14). He enrolled them in His army to overcome Satan and his forces and to rescue His people from their deadly clutches. Their appearances are always a sign of God's decisive and miraculous direct intervention, Who does not let the world and events run their own course. They bring messages to God's people and give them aid. They warn us, cheer us, and stand watch over us. They are even present when we gather together for worship. I wonder whether we ever think about this when attending church. The thought of their presence would greatly enhance our sense of worship and awe. As Calvin put it: God willed to appoint the angels to care for our salvation. Consequently they attend sacred assemblies, and the church is for them a theater in which they marvel at the varied and manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10). (Institutes III,xx,23) God sent cherubim with a flaming sword to prevent our first parents from entering paradise as in their fallen state they could no longer see God and live. Only the promised Messiah could reconcile God with man and usher in a new paradise.

The first human beings had to cut the ties with their past and go into the future with the promise of the coming Saviour hidden in their hearts. (Gen. 3:15) We can never regain lost paradise. We are moving toward the future. Looking back is not part of God's plan for us. We are strangers and pilgrims on earth. (1 Pet. 1:1) When Lot and his family hesitated to leave the doomed city of Sodom, the angels told them, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!" (Gen. 19:17)

Angels know everyone's standing with God. They are anxious to see them come to Him and to have them enter into His presence. They love people. They desire to see them become part of God's family and to inhabit heaven. So each time a sinner repents there is rejoicing by the angels in the presence of God (Luke 15:10).

### **The Ministry of Angels.**

Our loving God, who did not spare His only Son, sends His ministering angels to aid His pilgrims on their often arduous journey to the heavenly city prepared for them (Hebr. II :16). From the throne room in heaven

commands are given to angels to work in behalf of and for the benefits of the heirs of salvation. They are in subjection to the will of their Creator and do His bidding - "Then Peter came to himself and said, 'Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches.'" (Acts 12:11) Although there is a division of labour amongst them, all must obey and serve, not one is excluded. Even archangels have been put to work in the interest of God's elect. (Luke 1:11-38; Jude 9) The angels are sent out to minister for our good. John Owen wrote, commenting on Hebrews 1:14,

They are ministering spirits - "sent out unto a ministry." "Sent out," - that is, they are daily so, continually so, the word denoting the present time, which is always. They stand before the presence of God, and are continually sent out by him, sometimes some, sometimes others, - always those that are sufficient for his work.

The angels are instruments of the Lord mandated to assist Him in His rule over all creation. The process of history cannot be understood apart from the involvement of the angels in it. But their ministry is ultimately for the welfare of the church. For the sake of the church mighty empires have been raised and afterwards uprooted. (See Zech. 1:8-12) This is the good news behind the often disruptive bad news we hear about via the media.

The angels remain in contact with the world wherein we live. Although the contact is invisible and its very mention is called a superstition by many, it is real. The angels before whom Zechariah, the virgin Mary and the shepherds fell to the ground in fear are actually our unseen helpers. As we mature in our faith we will grow in our understanding of the influence of angels in our lives.

The angels assist us even until the very end of our lives. Unless the Lord returns in our life time, we all have to die. But even when dying we will receive help. God in His mercy will send His angel of death to escort us safely to His heavenly home. The angel of death ministers to the dying (Job 33:22) and bears the souls of the deceased saints to Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:22). And one day the angels will gather the elect into God's eternal kingdom. (Matt. 24:31).

### **Guardian Angels.**

Does everyone have a private guardian angel? Many people are convinced that they have one as their special protector. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that from infancy to death human life is surrounded by the watchful care and intercession of angels. And it quotes St. Basil in support of its belief in guardian angels. St. Basil said that

"Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life." But this idea has its roots in the apocryphal book of Tobit but not in the canonical Scriptures. Dr. H. Bavinck observes that the belief in guardian angels has pagan roots.

The Bible does not say anything about guardian angels who are on the side of one and all. It does not even support the notion that each believer has his or her own personal guardian angel. Yet it is appropriate to accept that God cares for us through His angels. Calvin comments:

For if the fact that all the heavenly host are keeping watch for his safety will not satisfy a man, I do not see what benefit he could derive from knowing that one angel has been given to him as his especial guardian. Indeed, those who confine to one angel the care that God takes of each one of us are doing a great injustice, both to themselves and to all the members of the church; as if it were an idle promise that we should fight more valiantly with these hosts supporting and protecting us round about! (Institutes 1, xiv, 7)

The Bible does reveal that God's people are protected and guarded by angels. (Hebr. 1:14) Psalm 91:11 says that God " will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. " Psalm 34:7 declares the same truth: "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. " God instructs angels to keep vigil for our safety and to take care that harm will not come to us.

In times of danger we may freely ask God to send an angel for our protection. And some have received the aid of an angel without even asking for it. When the great prophet Elijah was on the run for his life he came to a broom tree and sat down under it and in his despair he prayed that he might die. Then he lay under the tree and fell asleep. Our merciful covenant God sent an angel to get him motivated again.

. . an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, " Get up and eat for the journey is too much for you." So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God."(1 Kings 19:6-8) Many Christians have testified that in times of critical danger they suddenly felt a unseen protecting hand. Some tell of a mysterious warning not to proceed with their travel plans and then to discover later that their plane they were booked to fly with had crashed.

God employs angels for our good, that we may know how much He cares for us. But He does not always come to the rescue. Christians too get into fatal car accidents. The Lord sent an angel to deliver Peter but James was beheaded in prison. (Acts 12:2) God's ways with His people are mysterious. His ways are beyond our human understanding.

The angels preserve us from the hidden but powerful attacks by Satan. When tempted we may ask God to send an angel to come to our aid. In our volatile world children are often in danger; and perhaps for that reason our Lord said, "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)

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