

The Angels of God

Their Existence and their Ministry

The truth of angels can scarcely be said to be fundamental in the generally accepted sense of the word, but we present it here for a number of reasons. Although not a doctrine essential to salvation, it is one of the more basic doctrines of Holy Scripture; and having considered the doctrine of God and the doctrine of man, it seems appropriate to consider the doctrine of angels. Also, as we may see from the scriptural instance of the Sadducees (Acts 23:8), false teaching regarding angels may well be associated with fundamental error.

The words translated “angel” in Old and New Testaments simply mean “messenger”, and both are so used in a wide variety of spheres. For the most part, however, the reference is to those heavenly beings familiarly known as “angels”, whose natural dwelling is around the throne of God (Rev. 5:11).

Whatever may be the precise significance of the psalmist's words in Psalm 104:4 ("Who maketh His angels spirits" as A.V., or "Who maketh the winds His messengers" as in the R.V.), the quotation of the verse in Hebrews 1:7 shows that the sense "**Who maketh His angels spirits**" is at least a legitimate application. The three key words of the verse, "angels", "spirits" and "ministers" are brought together again at the end of that chapter, where we read of "the angels", "**are they not all ministering spirits...?**" (vs. 13,14).

We may learn from this statement then, that angels are created beings ("who **maketh**"), and that they are spirit beings ("spirits"). The significance of this last point has already been touched on in connection with the scripture, John 4:24, in the pamphlet ("God is [a] Spirit"). The angels are heavenly creatures and do not possess a physical body, although they are evidently capable of assuming a physical form when necessary for the fulfilment of their ministry. Just when they were created we do not know, but since they are depicted as rejoicing at the creation of the material universe (Job 38:7), they obviously belong to a previous creation. That this passage, in common with other passages, describes angels as "sons of God", indicates that they are His creatures, and that they display His glory, representing something of His character (as in Luke 2:9).

There are several terms employed in Scripture to designate heavenly beings, apart from the general term "angels". We read of cherubim, seraphim, principalities, powers, thrones, dominions. etc., terms which suggest gradation of rank among the heavenly hosts.

We also read of "**the archangel**" in Jude 9, whose name is Michael. Because the definite article is employed here, "**Michael THE archangel**", some suppose there is only one archangel. Others, however, do not agree with this conclusion, for as Michael is called in Daniel 10:13 "**one of the chief princes**", they assume that others of the same rank must exist, i.e. other archangels. The only other angel named in Scripture is Gabriel (Luke 1:19,26). He designates himself "**Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God**", a phrase which is used of "**the four spirits of the heavens**" in Zechariah 6:5. We may well suppose that the messenger chosen to announce the incarnation of the 'Only Begotten' Son of God would be one of highest rank, but we must beware of intruding into realms which are not specifically revealed, as in the case of the gnostic heresy which threatened the Colossian believers. This philosophy engaged in considerable speculation about angels, regarding them as intermediate in man's approach to God, and so affording them an honour which belongs exclusively to Christ (Col. 2:18).

The angels are regarded in Scripture as being very numerous. Daniel says of "**the Ancient of days**" that "**thousand thousands ministered unto Him**" (Dan. 7:10), while John employs very similar language in Revelation 5:11. In Hebrews 12:22 we read of "**myriads of angels (lit.)**", in Matthew 26:53 of "**more than twelve legions of angels**", and in Luke 2:13 of "**a multitude of the heavenly host**". Probably this is the basic significance of the divine title, "**LORD of hosts**". Compare "God's host" (Gen. 32:2; Psa. 103:21).

They are said to "**excel in strength**" (Psa. 103:20). Those that will accompany the Lord

Jesus at His return to earth in glory are described as "**the angels of His power**" (2Thess. 1:7 lit.) What a dreadful indication of their might, that in one night "**the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand**" (2Kings 19:35)! Another example of their power, just as remarkable if less dramatic, is seen in Peter's miraculous deliverance from prison (Acts 12:5-11).

The book of Daniel suggests that the angels are "**watchers**" and "**holy ones**" observing the affairs of the kingdoms of men (Dan. 4:13,17,23). They are cognisant of the work of God on earth (1Cor. 4:9), deeply interested in the message of the gospel (1Peter 1:12), sympathetic in the joy of its success (Luke 15:10), observant of the conduct of the local assembly (1Cor. 11:10), and appreciative of God's "**manifold wisdom**" revealed in His purpose for the church, the body of Christ (Eph. 3:10). They possess supernatural knowledge, and are acquainted with the mysteries of God (2Sam. 14:17,20; Dan. 8:15ff.; 9:21ff.).

It is an interesting and most instructive testimony to the incomparable greatness of God, and to the immense gulf that separates the Creator from even the mightiest of His creatures, that in comparison with it, poor, puny man is regarded as just "**a LITTLE lower than the angels**" (Psa. 8:5)!

In replying to the Sadducees the Lord Jesus Christ taught that 'the sons of the resurrection' are 'equal unto the angels' inasmuch as they "**neither marry, nor are given in marriage**", "**neither can they die**" (Matt. 22:30; Luke 20:35,36). Angels are always spoken of in the

masculine gender, and appear on earth as men, especially young men, as though in the fullness of vigour and power.

They have no difficulty in communicating with men in any language, they seem to possess a tongue or tongues of their own, distinguished from all human languages (1Cor. 13:1).

In the book of Revelation angels are seen in control of natural forces (7:1-3); and as they are linked with these also in Psalms 104 and 148, it may be suggested that they are the intelligent agents behind inanimate nature, all of course under the sovereignty of God. We may gather that they govern in the national affairs of men (Dan. 10:13; 12:1; Zech. 1:8-11). Also they are often seen in Scripture “ministering” in many different ways on behalf of the people of God, warning, comforting, strengthening, instructing, preserving, delivering, etc. They will also be very active in the last day, **“the day of the LORD”**, in the execution of God’s judgement upon the earth and the ingathering of the elect; though government of **“the world to come”** is not committed to them, but to man (Matt. 13:39,41,49; 24:31; Revelation chapters 5-20; compare Heb. 2:5,6). They may well be regarded as the unseen executors of God’s mysterious providences, whether in mercy or in judgement.

Because they generally keep very much in the background, seeking only the glory of the God they serve (Rev. 22:8,9) – a lovely example of selfless service! – their ministry is often overlooked and unappreciated. There can be no doubt that we have no idea at all of how much mankind as a race, or as nations, or as individuals, or even the people of God, owes to the prompt,

efficient, faithful and absolutely unselfish service of angels.

In the early centuries of the Christian age it was widely believed and taught from Matthew 18:10 (Acts 12:15), that each saint of God had a personal guardian angel, and this may indeed be the case, though we cannot dogmatise about it.

At times **“the angel of the LORD”** is obviously something (or someone) more than a creature, being a theophany, or manifestation of a Divine Being in angelic form. The visitations granted to Hagar, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Manoah etc., were doubtless preincarnate visitations of the Son of God. He is called **“the messenger (angel) of the covenant”** in Malachi 3:1. (Compare Judges 2:1).

So far our consideration has been of **“holy angels”** (Mark 8:38), i.e. not of “angels that sinned”. The reason for their preservation when others fell is that they were “elect” (1Tim. 5:21). There is a difference here between elect angels and elect men, inasmuch as their election preserved some of the angels from falling when others fell, whereas in men election effects the salvation of some of those who are fallen, leaving others to the ruin of the fall. But in both cases election must be the sovereign operation of the grace of God.

It should fill our hearts with unspeakable gratitude and love and worship, that though there is no salvation provided for fallen angels, the grace of God manifest in the incarnate Son has provided it for the fallen sons of men (Heb. 2:14-16). Angels ministered to Him in His life, but their aid was unsought in His death, that by His suffering and sacrifice salvation might be purchased for sinful humanity.