

SPECIAL STUDY FOUR

THE MYSTERY AND MINISTRY OF ANGELS

by Herbert Lockyer

Universal belief in angelic existence became enveloped in a mythological covering, both among Jews and those destitute of Divine Revelation (Col. 2:18). Gradually, the worship of angels prevailed among all people, and became common before the apostolic age, and false teachers, finding this corruption of the true doctrine of angels, adapted it to subserve their ambition, giving it their zealous support. But the prompt reproof John received from the ministering angel testifies to the fact that angel worship was both a mark of folly and a sin (Rev. 22:2-9).

At first men began to worship the sun, moon and stars by whom the celestial hosts were supposed to be inhabited. (cf. Job. 31:26). This was called Zebianism and is believed to have originated among the star-gazers in Chaldea, and brought into Arabia in the days of Job (cf. Deut. 17:2-3).

The Jewish rabbis divided their doctrine of angels thusly:

The Heavens: the residence of seven archangels (neither of the two Biblical archangels are mentioned).

The Heaven of Heavens; divided into 10 departments, each occupied by numerous companies of angels under the command of their respective chiefs.

Another tradition says, "Every man has his angel who speaks for him, and prays for him; as it said, 'O thou that hearest prayer,' Psa. 65:27; that is the prayer of the angel, who is the Marshal or guardian of men."

CREATION OF ANGELS

The angels owe their being to God's creative act, but when this took place belongs to God's secret counsels. As the Sons of God referred to in Job 38:4-7 are generally believed to be angels, they were existing when the foundations of the earth were fastened. (cf. also Psa. 148:2-3; Neh. 9:6).

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There are many speculations as to when and how the angels were created, but the creation record was not designed to include a history of celestial beings, but an account of the creation of the earth and man and the scheme of redemption of man. That the angels were created by God and for His glory is undeniable (Heb. 1:1-3).

When created by God, all the angels were good. Some, however, fell from their celestial wisdom and position through the misuse of their liberty. God made nothing evil. The evil spirits were not created demons but became demons when by a free act, they cut themselves off from their Creator.

NATURE OF ANGELS

Angels are spirit-beings. They have no bodies as we understand them, although at times they have assumed human form. As pure spirits, Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7, 14, there can be no question of procreation or generation among the angels, of angelic families or relatives. Angels are sexless (Matt. 22:30). Each angel stands apart as a direct creation of God, and complete as an individual. There is a difference of rank among angels, but not of species. All are angels.

The true nature of angels is expressed by the word *Spirit*. It is somewhat hard for us to form any idea of a spirit. We know what it is not, than what it is. (Lk. 24:39).

Being without bodies the angels are *invisible*. Further, being incorporeal and immaterial, they are *immortal*. They have no parts capable of disunion and dissolution. Even the rebellious angels continue and perish not. Psa. 104:4 indicates that they are endowed with wonderful activity, moving with the swiftness of the winds, and operating with the force and energy of flaming fire. Although the angels are invisible through such organs of vision as we possess, it would seem that they will come with Jesus (to bring glory to Him) in a spiritual body (I Cor. 15) which will be recognizable, else how will Jesus be glorified when they come with him.

At His incarnation, our Lord did not take upon Himself the nature—physical constitution or existence—of angels, but the seed of the man Abraham, Heb. 2:16. Had Christ chosen to lay hold of fallen angels, with a view of raising them from their lost estate, He would without doubt have

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taken upon Himself their nature, and descended into the pit; identifying Himself with their miseries, and paving, by His sufferings, a pathway across the great gulf fixed which intervenes between their lost estate and Paradise. But verily He took not hold of angels, but of the seed of Abraham; and had no alternative, therefore, but to assimilate Himself in all points to the nature of those whom, in infinite mercy and grace, He brothered."

THE ATTRIBUTES OF ANGELS

1. CELESTIAL QUALITIES

As to their nature, angels are Spirits (Heb. 1:7, 14), of windlike velocity, subtle nature, capable of close communion with God, sharers in His truth, purity, love, since they ever behold His face (Matt. 18:10) even as the redeemed shall (I Jn. 3:2); not necessarily incorporeal, (Lk. 20:37; Phil. 3:21; I Cor. 15:44) seemingly but not certainly implying their having bodies. Their glorious appearance (Dan. 10:6) like our Lord's when transfigured and afterwards as the ascended Saviour (Rev. 1:14-16), and their human form (Lk. 24:4) favor the same view.

2. INTELLECTUAL QUALITIES

Angels are the most understanding creatures in heaven or earth and, because of their rationality and knowledge, are likened unto a man, Ezek. 1:5. Angels are the best of philosophers, knowing the principles, causes, effects, life, notions, death, of natural things (Rev. 7:1,12). They are also great statisticians, knowing the affairs of kingdoms (Dan. 10:13). Gabriel became a courtier, acquainting himself with the affairs of Persia. Angels are never so heavenly minded as to be of no earthly use. The knowledge of angels is limited in that it does not extend to future events (Matt. 24:36) and the mysteries of grace. They desire to look into the wonder of man's redemption and learn of the Church, the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:9-10; I Pet. 1:12; Dan. 10:13).

3. MORAL QUALITIES

The angels as spirits, are superior to men but inferior to God, Psa. 8; 4-5; Heb. 1:7-8. Although spiritual personalities, they cannot create, change, alter the laws of nature,

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perform miracles of themselves, or search the heart. These prerogatives belong to God and His Word, and the angels act only as He directs.

Along with the highest intelligence, there is the possession of the utmost moral excellence and loveliness of character. Thus the angels are good, gentle, meek, kind and compassionate. Could any creation of the God of love be fashioned without the capacity of love? If the angels can sing and rejoice, then they can love. They exult in victory over the powers of darkness and in the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom and in the salvation of the lost (Lk. 2:14; 15:10).

Dwelling in God, then, the angels dwell in love (I Jn. 4:16). We cannot fully grasp the reach of an angel's mind, or the fervour of one's benevolence and love. They ever hearken to God's voice and obey His will Psa. 103:20. They deem it their chief end to praise and glorify their Creator Psa. 148:2.

4. PHYSICAL QUALITIES

Angels exercise their power in material and spiritual realms (2 Ki. 19:35; 2 Thess. 1:7). They are spoken of as "the sons of the mighty (Psa. 89:6). Their power is superhuman (2 Ki. 6:17; Zech. 12:8; II Pet. 2:11). They "excel in strength," (Ps. 103:20). Angels can "chase," (Ps. 35:5-6) "fight" (Gen. 32:1; 2 Sam. 5:24) "open prison doors" (Acts 5:19—12:7) "liberate the dead" (Matt. 28:2) and "throw great millstones into the sea" (Rev. 18:21) and "shut the mouths of lions" (Dan. 6:22).

THE MISSION OF ANGELS

From first to last, the angels of God are ministering spirits. Worship and ministry are their twofold function—priests in the heavenly temple: messengers on God's errands of love and justice, Isa. 6:1-3; Dan. 7:9, 10; Rev. 5:11. Angelic activity covers all history, ancient and modern, national and personal. THE WORLD IS IN CLOSER TOUCH WITH HEAVENLY FORCES THAN IT DREAMS (and the forces of Hell also, we might add).

As servants of God, Christ and man, the angels have manifold relationship we can summarize in the following way:

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1. *Relation of Angels to God*: Brought into being by God, the angels stand ready to do his bidding. His will and theirs are one.
 - a. They were created by the wish of God, Neb. 9:6; Col. 1:16
 - b. They worship and adore the Triune God, Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 1:6
 - c. They communicate the Will of God, Dan. 8:16, 17; 10:11, etc.
 - d. They obey the command of God, Ps. 103:20; Matt. 6:10
 - e. They execute the purpose of God in grace and providence, Num. 22:22; Ps. 103:21; Jn. 5:4
 - f. They administer the judgments of God, 2 Sam. 24:16; 2 Ki. 19:35; Ps. 35:5-
 - g. They celebrate the praise of God, Job. 38:7; Ps. 148:2; Isa. 6:3; Lk. 2:12; Rev. 5:11-12
 - h. They minister the law of God, Ps. 68:17; Acts 7:53; Heb. 2:2
2. *Relation of Angels to Christ*: It was personal and intimate.
 - a. An angel prophesied the conception and birth of Christ, Lk. 1:26:35 (cf. also Acts 2:29-36)
 - b. An angel named the Coming One, Matt. 1:21; the song of redemption is one angels cannot sing, Heb. 2:16. They are happy to surround His throne but will never have the privilege of sitting with Him on His throne, Rev. 3:21; 5:11
 - c. Angels announced to the shepherds the birth of Jesus, Lk. 2:8-15
 - d. An angel directed Joseph as to the Child's safety, Mat. 1:2-21, 24
 - e. Angels ministered to Christ after His temptation, Matt. 4:11; Mk. 1:13
 - f. An angel strengthened Christ after His agony in Gethsemane, Lk. 22:43-44
 - g. Angels were Witnesses and Heralds of Christ's Resurrection; an angel rolled away the stone, Matt. 28:2-7; they guarded the tomb and witnessed Jn. 20:11-14 (cf. Lk. 24:23)

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- h. Angels attended Christ at His Ascension, Acts 1:3
- i. Angels are to attend Christ at His Second Advent, I Thess. 4:16; II Thess. 1:7-9

Relation of Angels to the Nations

1. Paul speaks of the "world rulers" of the darkness of this world Eph. 2:3; 6:12
2. Christ did not dispute the claim of Satan to the control of the kingdoms of this world (cf. Matt. 12:26) where a kingdom of Satan is taught)
3. In Dan. 10:21; 12:1 we discover that demon-angels have power to connect themselves with different nations. An important angelic personage is Satanic angel (demon) "the prince of the kingdom of Persia," Dan. 10:13. A second demonic personality is mentioned as "the prince of Grecia," Dan. 10:20
4. The devil has angels (Rev. 12:7). They are the instruments of his will. Satan enthroned himself as the unseen ruler of the nations and, at different times in the history of the world, has expressed through rulers his own character in opposition to God's character.
5. Under Satan's leadership Tyre became one of the leading powers of the world and leaders in wickedness (Ezek. 28)
6. Babylon became the seat of Satanic influence. At another critical period in the Church's history Satan's throne was in Pergamos Rev. 2:13
7. Unseen forces are presently active as "the rulers of the darkness of this world."
8. It is distressing to think of these mighty potentates of evil being the invisible rulers of this world . . . Yet how comforting to know that no existing power, seen or unseen, can tear the believer from the love of God

Relation of Angels to the Jewish Nation

1. The law was ordained of angels; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2; Acts 7:53; Ps. 68:17
2. Note:
An angel commissioned Moses to redeem Israel, Ex. 3:2
An angel led the nation in the wilderness, Es. 14:19; 23:20-23
An angel rebuked the nation for its idolatry, Judges 2:1-5

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An angel called Gideon to deliver the nation, J. 6:11-40

An angel smote the nation with pestilence, 2 Sam. 24:16-17

An angel smote the nation's foes, 2 Ki. 19:35

An angel encamped round about the nation, Ps. 34:7; 91:11

3. The Sadducees denied angels' existence

Relation of Angels to the Church and believers

1. Angels are present when the church gathers for worship
I Cor. 11:10
2. Angels watch over the affairs of the church, I Cor. 4:9; Heb. 12:22; I Tim. 5:21
3. Angels present the Church's worship before God, Rev. 8:3-4, 5; I Pet. 1:12; I Cor. 4:9; I Cor. 6:2-3
4. God does not now speak to men through angels, Gal. 1:8-12; Acts 9:5
5. Angels are employed to Guard and Preserve the saints, Matt. 4:11; Lk. 22:43; Jn. 5:4; Acts 27:21-35; Ps. 91:11; Heb. 1:14; Acts 12:7; 27:23; Acts 5:19
6. Angels care for the young in faith, Matt. 18:10; 18:16; Ps. 34:7; 91:11; Heb. 1:14; Lk. 1:19
7. Angels assist in answering the prayers of saints, Rev. 8:3; 5:8; Dan. 10:12-14
8. Angels afford evidence of God's love and care for saints, Gen. 28:12-13; Jn. 1:51
9. Angels convey to heaven the souls of saints, Lk. 6:22; Mk. 13:27; Heb. 12:22-23
10. Angels minister at the resurrection of saints, I Thess. 4; Matt. 24