

Angels: God's Invisible Army, Part 3

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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INTRODUCTION

An important lesson I have learned out of this study on angels is the steps God has taken to make His children physically secure. Knowing that should alleviate many of the anxieties we might unfortunately tend to have about accidents, disease, or other kinds of danger. God's angels are truly amazing beings. They guide and protect us, yet those are only two of their ministries to believers.

Restoring the Angelic Song

The context of Job 38:4-6 is God's creation of the world. At the creation, "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (v. 7). From our previous studies we learned that that is a reference to angels. Therefore we know that angels sang in the past. In Revelation 5:11-12 John says, "I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb." Were they singing? Verse 9 says, "They sang a new song." Apparently the angels in heaven join the four living creatures (other angels) and the twenty-four elders (representatives of the church) in the new song. Angels are seen singing twice in the Bible--once at the creation of the world, and again at the return of Jesus Christ. But there is no record of their singing between those two events. It's as if the angels lost their song when man fell, and that the only thing that will restore their song is the return of Jesus Christ.

REVIEW

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LESSON

5. Protecting

Angels protect God's people from physical danger. The Bible gives us several illustrations of that.

a) The fiery furnace King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had an ego problem--he wanted everyone in his kingdom to worship the golden image he had set up (Dan. 3:5). (1) The refusal by the Hebrew men Three Hebrew young men--Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego--refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's gods or his image (vv. 12-15). At their indictment they said, "O Nebuchadnezzar,

we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (vv. 16-18).⁽²⁾ The rage of the king Nebuchadnezzar was filled with rage: "The form of his visage [facial expression] was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; therefore, he spoke, and commanded that they should heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their stockings, and their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore, because the king's commandment was urgent and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace" (vv. 19-23).⁽³⁾ The rescue by the angel The narrative continues: "Nebuchadnezzar, the king, was astounded, and rose up in haste, and spoke, and said unto his counselors, Did not we cast three men, bound, into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like a son of the gods. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spoke, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the Most High God, come forth, and come here. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego came forth from the midst of the fire. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counselors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them. Then Nebuchadnezzar spoke, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him" (vv. 24-28). Some people believe the fourth person was Jesus Christ, the Angel of the Lord. Nebuchadnezzar referred to him as one "like a son of the gods." This unique angel delivered those three godly men from the midst of a furnace that burned to death those who threw them in.^{b)} The lions' den Angels certainly were busy in the life of Daniel and his three companions. In Daniel 6 a different king, Darius, ruled the Medo-Persian empire. He had the same problem as Nebuchadnezzar--he wanted everyone to worship him (vv. 7-9). Having caught Daniel praying to God rather than Darius, the princes "brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the [since humbled] king spoke and said unto Daniel, Thy God, whom thou servest continually, He will deliver thee" (v. 16). Darius liked Daniel, and had respect for Daniel's God, hoping that He would protect Daniel from the lions. The narrative continues: "A stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, with the signet of his lords, that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting; neither were instruments of music brought before him; and his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel. And the king spoke and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live forever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me" (vv. 18-22). God protected Daniel by sending an angel.^{c)} The tempestuous sea Acts 27 details Paul's voyage to Rome. While sailing, "there arose against it [the ship] a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. And running under the lee of a certain island which is called Cauda, we had much work to secure the boat [the dinghy], which, when they had hoisted it, they used helps, undergirding the ship" (vv. 14-17). Verse 17 says the crew feared being driven into the quicksands or Syrtes, a graveyard of ships on the North African coast. So, "they struck sail [lowered the sail], and so were driven. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest,

the next day they lightened the ship; and the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackle of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away" (vv. 17-20). Without sun and stars to use as reference, they were unable to navigate. Thus they had no idea where the tempest was taking them, and they fully expected to capsize or be smashed into something. The narrative continues: "After being long without food, Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said ... I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul, thou must be brought before Caesar; and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee" (vv. 21-24). While that ship was being driven across the Mediterranean, there might have been a legion of angels protecting everyone on board. The ship was, in fact, destroyed by the sea, but everyone made it safely to shore. It happened just as the angel said it would. God's angels protect His people. They take care of us when we drive on the highway, and they protect our children. When I realize that God has His angels looking out for my children, I don't worry about them because angels can do things for them that I couldn't even if I were with them.

6. Delivering

This doesn't refer to preventing trouble, but getting people out of trouble.

a) The apostles In its infancy the church experienced tremendous growth from the preaching of the apostles. But the Jewish leaders were upset about the church's popularity and decided to do something about it: "The high priest rose up, and all they that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees) and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But an angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing outside before the doors; but when we had opened, we found no man within" (Acts 5:17-23). How did they get out? The angel let them out. It's exciting to know you can't ever get yourself into a situation that God can't remove you from if He so chooses. That ought to be particularly encouraging to missionaries. With boldness they can go into dangerous places knowing that God can deliver them with His angels. b) Peter The persecution of the early church got worse. James was executed and Peter was thrown in prison (Acts 12:2-4). "Peter, therefore, was kept in prison; but prayer was made without ceasing by the church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, an angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shone in the prison; and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him, and knew not that it was true which was done by the angel, but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second guard, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out, and passed on through one street; and immediately the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod" (vv. 5-11). c) The heroes of faith Think how active God and His angels must have been in the lives of all the people referred to in Hebrews 11. They delivered Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets, "who, through faith, subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword" (vv. 33-34). Throughout history angels have served

God's people by protecting and delivering them.d) The 144,000 Angels will protect God's people during the Tribulation. After the Lord removes the true church from the world, God will take 144,000 Jews, twelve thousand from every tribe of Israel, and use them as evangelists (Rev. 7:4-10). As a result all Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:26). To make sure no one hurts God's chosen evangelists, God will have His angels place a protective seal on them. John wrote, "I saw another angel ascending from the the east, having the seal of the living God; and he cried with a loud voice ... saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads" (Rev. 7:2-3). The angel sealed the 144,000 so they wouldn't be harmed during the Tribulation. Perhaps the seal is a means of identification so that the angels know whom they are to protect from the slaughter during the Tribulation.

7. Facilitating God's answers to prayer

Angels do not answer prayer, but they can be involved in bringing about the answer God desires.

a) An exampleThe angel who took Peter out of prison did so in response to the fervent prayers of the church (Acts 12:5); God sent the angel to deliver Peter in answer to their prayers. Daniel 9:20-27 and 10:10-14 are other examples of God sending answers to prayer with an angel.b) A warningLet me add that we do not pray to angels because they don't exercise their own will independently of God. They are only servants--they obey God. Prayer offered to God is the only prayer ever heard. But God may discharge activate His angels to bring a response to that prayer.

8. Attending deaths

Billy Graham wrote, "Hundreds of accounts record the heavenly escort of angels at death. When my maternal grandmother died, for instance, the room seemed to fill with a heavenly light. She sat up in bed and almost laughingly said, "I see Jesus ... and I see the angels" (Angels: God's Secret Agents [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975], p. 152).

Does Scripture support such claims? Luke 16:19-22 says, "There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table; moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." That man may not have been significant to anyone in the world, but when he died, God dispatched His angels to take him to heaven.

9. Gathering the elect

Angels will minister to the Tribulation saints--those who will be redeemed during that period. When Jesus returns, "He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect" (Matt. 24:31). The angels will gather all the saints together.

10. Serving

During the millennial kingdom, angels will serve us as we rule. First Corinthians 6:2-3 says, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?... Know ye not that we shall judge [rule over] angels?" In the coming kingdom we will rule with Christ as co-regents and joint heirs (Matt. 19:28; Rom. 8:17). The angels will be subject to us.

What should our attitude be toward angels? We ought to respect them as holy servants of God. We ought to appreciate them, knowing how they help us. And we ought to follow their example of continual worship and service to God.

Should We Worship Angels?

While we can be appreciative of angels and follow their example, we should not worship them because that is sin. Angels don't want our worship, and Scripture forbids the worship of angels.

1. Colossians 2:18--"Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels." Don't let anyone trick you into worshipping angels.

2. Revelation 19:10--The apostle John fell down at the feet of an angel to worship him, but the angel

said to him, "See thou do it not! I am thy fellow servant.... Worship God."

3. Revelation 22:8-9--John obviously was a little slow in learning his lesson: "I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not; for I am thy fellow servant.... Worship God."

What do angels ask from us? Only that we worship God. Angels are but an extension of God's love, care, power, grace, and provision. All the glory belongs to God, not angels, and they wouldn't have it any other way.

D. To Unbelievers

How do angels operate in the lives of unbelievers? Only one way-- they are God's executioners. They were involved in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19). They brought judgment on Egypt as executioners of the Egyptian first-born (Ex. 12:23, 29). One angel killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in answer to the prayer of Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:14-20, 35).

1. In the past

In Acts 12 we are introduced to Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great. This Herod was so proud that he established a national holiday to honor himself. Displeased with the existing political situation, Herod took what was supposed to be Roman emperor's commemoration day and turned it into his own day. Acts 12:21-23 says, "Upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not a man. And immediately an angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory; and he was eaten of worms, and died."

2. In the future

Throughout Revelation 6-19 angels appear as emissaries of judgment.

a) Revelation 8:7; 9:1--"The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mixed with blood, and they were cast upon the earth; and the third part of trees burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up. And the second angel sounded, and, as it were, a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea; and the third part of the sea became blood; and the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed. And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as though it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters. And the name of the star is called Wormwood; and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter. And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars, so that the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise. And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound! And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth; and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit." The text goes on to explain what happens as a result of the last three trumpets and the terrible judgments that accompany them.b) Revelation 16:2-4, 8, 10-11--The following is just a sampling of what happens when the bowls of wrath are poured out on the earth: "The first went, and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and there fell a foul and painful sore upon the men.... And the second angel poured out his bowl upon the sea, and it became like the blood of a dead man; and every living soul died in the sea. And the third angel poured out his bowl upon the rivers and fountains of waters, and they became blood.... And the fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.... And the fifth angel poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds." The two final bowls bring further judgment.c) 2

Thessalonians 1:7-9--"To you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed

from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."d) Matthew 13:41-42-- "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them who do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."e) Matthew 25:41--"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." The ungodly will spend eternity with the fallen angels. And their judgment will be carried out by "the Son of man ... and all the holy angels" (v. 31).

CONCLUSION

It's tragic to think about the options: you receive either the ministry of angels given to believers, or that given to unbelievers. Each of us chooses which ministry we will receive. If you receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, the angels will perform a work of watching, revealing, guiding, protecting, providing, delivering, bringing answers to prayer, and carrying you into heaven. But if you reject Jesus Christ, the angels will cast you into hell.

The angels much prefer it if you turn to Christ. Luke 15:8-10 says, "What woman, having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a lamp, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (vv. 8- 10). The angels would much rather care for you as a believer than judge you as an unbeliever.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What made Shadrach , Meshach, and Abednego willing to suffer the consequences of disobeying the law (Dan. 3:16-18).
2. After being released by the angel, what command did he give that the apostles followed (Acts 5:19-21)?
3. What did Peter first think was happening when the angel miraculously delivered him (Acts 12:9)?
4. During the Tribulation, how will the 144,000 Jewish evangelists be protected?
5. How will angels minister to believers right after the Tribulation (Matt. 24:31)?
6. What position will glorified believers have that will cause the angels to be subject to us in the millennial kingdom (Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 6:2-3)?
7. Why shouldn't we worship angels?
8. Why was Herod Agrippa I struck down by an angel (Acts 12:23)?
9. How will angels carry out God's judgment?
10. What causes joy among the angels (Luke 15:10)?

Pondering the Principles

1. Review the section about the tempestuous sea . After many days of being at the storm's mercy, "all hope ... was then taken away" (Acts 27:20). Sometimes God has to bring people to the depths of despair before they will look to Him. There may be people around you who have lost all hope in their work, marriage, or children. Pray for sensitivity to their needs and that God might use you to offer them words of hope from Scripture.
2. Many times people refuse to listen to the wise counsel of a godly man or woman. Some disregarded Paul's angelic promise and worried about their own safety (Acts 27:30), but Paul made it clear that his advice must be followed for God's promise to be fulfilled (vv. 31-32). Verse 44 says that all 276 people on board "were brought safely to land" (NASB). When we are faithful to obey, God is

faithful in fulfilling His promises to us. Is there any area of your life where you have failed to obey God's Word? Strive to be more like the centurion, who, although he didn't believe Paul at first (v. 11), finally realized he should trust him (vv. 31-32). Have respect for the godly people in your life and be sure to carefully consider what they say.

3. Many in the church prayed fervently for God to release Peter when he was in prison (Acts 12:5). But when he was miraculously released by the angel, many of those who prayed for it didn't believe it had happened (vv. 15-16). Are you praying for something you don't expect God will do? Are you merely going through the motions of prayer? Be faithful in your prayers and don't be surprised when God answers them. Read what Jesus had to say about the miraculous power of prayer in Mark 11:23-24; Luke 11:5-10, 18:1-8; and John 15:7).

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