

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

ANGELS

*“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”
(Heb. 1:14).*

From Genesis to Revelation, the Scriptures are full of the work of the angels. The first and last books of the Bible, in particular, show us angels dealing with individuals and nations; but they are featured throughout the whole of Scripture because this is the way God has chosen to work with His creation and to fulfil His purpose. This world is under the direction of the angels, who now receive their authority and power from Christ; and this will remain so until the Kingdom is established, when Christ and the saints will rule.

The work of the angels can be divided into three sections:

- Representing God (Ex. 3:1-6)
- Directing the nations (Dan. 4:35)
- Ministering to the saints (Heb. 1:14)

These have been their responsibilities since the Garden of Eden.

The Hebrew word (*malak*) and the Greek word (*aggelos*) for ‘angel’ both mean ‘messenger’, ‘one sent’, and relate to the function and not the nature of the one involved. The context and event will identify whether Scripture is describing a messenger who is a Divine being or a human being. For example, Malachi 2:7; 3:1 and James 2:25 clearly use these words of human beings, and Judges 13:20 and Acts 12:7 clearly use them of Divine beings. Hence in the first case the translation ‘messenger’ is used, and in the second, ‘angel’.

Angels that excel in strength

These Divine beings that come from the presence of God and Christ have been involved with this earth since they created it on the instructions of God. They are immortal, not influenced by evil, and carry out the commands of God and Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit which has been given to them. They have the ability to appear and disappear at will, and can manifest themselves as human beings or glorious beings, as a burning bush or a hand that writes on a wall, or a pillar of cloud or fire. The Scripture shows us that they have names, for angels called Gabriel and Michael are mentioned, and that they have different ranks, for some are called archangels.

(Dan. 10:13,21; 12:1; 1 Thess. 4:16; Jude v. 9; Ex. 3:2; Judg. 13)

Representing God

In the Old Testament there is the Name-bearing angel that represents God. On occasions the angel is referred to as LORD (Yahweh), on other occasions as God. The word ‘God’ is often used of the angels; the plural Hebrew word *elohim* means ‘mighty ones’. It was the angels (‘God’; *elohim*) that said: “Let us make man in our image” (Gen. 1:26). It was an angel that spoke to Moses at the burning bush and said: “I am the God of thy father . . .”; and in the same passage we read: “And when the LORD [Yahweh] saw that he [Moses] turned aside . . .”, which teaches

us that God was being represented by this angel. Jesus has now become the one who represents his Father, and the angels go forth under his command and in his power.

(Ex. 3:1-6; 23:20-23; Heb. 1:1-5; 1 Pet. 3:22; Rev. 1:1)

Directing the affairs of the nations

It is very clear from Scripture that the angels had a direct influence on the events concerning the nation of Israel, and in so doing affected lives and events in many other nations. This was done by both direct and indirect action, such as slaying an army as it slept in tents around Jerusalem, or changing weather patterns to bring about droughts, famines or floods. Rulers and governments are removed or installed, or influenced to react in certain ways, to the end that ultimately God's will is fulfilled.

This has been the case since the beginning of time, and the book of Revelation emphasises that it will continue until God's Kingdom is established. The example of the scattering of Israel and then the regathering and subsequent establishment in the land is a clear witness to the work of the angels in this present day. Bible prophecy is dependent on angelic involvement.

(Isa. 37:36; Job 37:12,13; Ps. 148:7,8; Dan. 4:25,35; 10:13,21; Rev. 7:1-3; 8:2-6; 16:1)

Ministering to the saints

The care of the believer, and the moulding of the believer's character through the experiences and events of his or her life, are important parts of the work of the angels. To them is given the responsibility, under the direction of Christ and his heavenly Father, of preparing the saints for the Kingdom. The psalmist came to understand that all his thoughts, words and actions were observed by the angels, communicated to God, and the events in his life influenced by them. The same was true for men such as Jacob, Daniel and Paul.

Angels are acting on behalf of heaven with those called to be saints. Their function is to "minister" to us, to "encamp . . . round about" us, and to "keep [us] in all [our] ways". They do not remove our free will, but strive to influence us in the ways of God. They are involved with our prayers, while remaining unseen, so that our faith might be developed as required by our heavenly Father. They will chasten and prove us as necessary. In this present life the believer is brought into the presence of "an innumerable company of angels".

(Gen. 28:12; 45:7; 48:15,16; Ps. 34:6,7; 91:11; Dan. 6:22; Acts 10:1-8; 27:23; Heb. 1:14; 12:22)

Summary of the angels' work

This world is under the direction of the angels, and they are overseeing the work of drawing all nations to Jerusalem. Often in the New Testament their activities are described as the work of the Spirit—as in the case of Philip (Acts 8:26,29) and in the imparting of the Holy Spirit to the apostles (Ps. 104:4; Acts 2:2-4). They are involved in the lives of believers, exercising care over them. They will be involved in the judgement, with the raising of the dead and the gathering of the living saints to Christ. They rejoice in the purpose of God and in the fulfilment of His will, and joyfully praise His great and holy Name. They obey the Creator, and it will be the privilege of the faithful to be like them in the Kingdom age.

(Ps. 103:20; Mt. 16:27; 24:31; 25:31; 1 Thess. 4:16; Heb. 2:5)

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