

The Angels of God

Our New Testament reading for the day, Matthew chapter 22 provides us with a glimpse of how things will be ordered in the coming kingdom of Messiah:

“... in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are *as the angels of God* in heaven” (Mat. 22:30).

There is a comparison to be made then, between the Immortal messengers of the Almighty, and the position of honoured saints in the coming kingdom. Again, the Master said in his well-known prayer of Matthew chapter 5: “thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven” (Mat. 5:10). The Angels are the agents whereby things in Heaven are done according to Yahweh’s Will, and the immortalised saints are the agents by which things shall be similarly done in earth. So it is that by considering the Angels of God, we can see a likeness of what Messiah’s brethren will become; a vision of immortal life manifested in a great multitude of the redeemed.

In our exhortation this morning then, we propose to consider a particular facet of Bible teaching concerning these Divine Messengers, in the context of deliverance and blessings.

2 Kings Chapter 19 expresses Hezekiah’s confidence in Yahweh in the face of the Assyrian invasion that had beset the land. In his prayer he asks:

“... now therefore O Yahweh our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art Yahweh Elohim, even thou only” (2 Kings 19:19).

The answer came through the prophet Isaiah:

“... I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake. And it came to pass that night, that *the angel of Yahweh went out*, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.” (2 Kings 19:34-35).

We find therefore that the means whereby Yahweh delivered his people from a power of sin, was through the work of an Angel appointed to the task. In some ways, we are in a similar position as Israel of old. We are at enmity with the world around us, and daily we face the power of sin active within our mortal frames. Each day is a warfare against the flesh – both within and without, and there is no discharge until the day of our death, or the appearance of our Master, whichever comes first. But like Israel, we are appointed Angels to watch over us, even as it is written: “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation”? (Heb. 1:14). We would do well therefore, to scrutinise the angelic activity in relation to Israel, that we might understand more about the ministers that attend to us in our own lives.

When we consult the Old Testament writings, we find that Angels had a role right from the very beginning of Israel’s history. Acts 7 and verse 53 describes how Israel “have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it”. And Exodus 23 recounts the promise of divine blessing and protection when Israel were to go forth to take possession of the land of promise:

“Behold, I send an Angel *before thee*, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which *I have prepared* ... mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off.” (Exod. 23:20,23)

The role of the Angel so described in some measure compares with the role of our Master, even Jesus himself. Just as the Angel was to go “before” Israel to the place “prepared”, and overcome the enemy, our Lord speaks likewise:

“In my Father’s house are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would have told you. And if I go *and prepare* a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (Jno. 14:2-3).

Church tradition would lead us to believe that Jesus is here promising his followers a place in heaven – even though these words mention nothing about heaven. What is promised is a place in “my Father’s House” – a house which in Old Testament times was described as the “Temple,” as constructed after a divine pattern by Solomon. Even so the prophetic Scriptures reveal that this “house” is to be reconstructed as “a house of prayer for all nations” (Isa. 56:7), and is described in considerable detail in the latter chapters of Ezekiel’s prophecy. King David spoke of his desire to be given a place in this house:

“a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper **in the house of my God**, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psa. 84:10)

“... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell **in the house of Yahweh** for ever” (Psa. 23:6).

To be granted a dwelling place in Yahweh’s house therefore, is to be granted an abiding place within the coming Temple of the new age in which Messiah’s laws shall go forth to the ends of the earth. What a glorious prospect this is!

The point of comparison, is that just as the Angel would go forth to defeat Israel’s enemies in order that they could inherit the place “prepared”, even so Messiah has gone before to defeat the power of Sin, in order that we might be able to inherit the place he has prepared for us. Being “the Way” as well as the Truth and the Life, he is able to lead us into a position in his Father’s coming kingdom, if we but put our trust in Him. That does not mean to say, however, that we shall experience no difficulties along the way, or that we do not need to exert much effort ourselves. Even though Israel were promised possession of the Land, they had to go forth to war against the powers of sin themselves. They couldn’t simply sit at the border and expect the land to be turned over to their control: they had to fight, and contend against their enemies. The Angel used the people’s own endeavours to bring about success. Even so Brother Roberts wrote: “Human action is the basis of Divine Supervision – without it, the Angels have nothing to work on.” We must engage ourselves in the same warfare as Christ did, in order for him to lead us into victory. We must also therefore “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim.2:3), and be willing to suffer for his sake.

There is an aspect of the Angelic care that is sometimes overlooked. It is thought that because we have divine “ministers” to help us, that therefore we should experience no evil. A little reflection, however, reveals the short-sightedness of such a view. It is part of the Father’s purpose that we endure afflictions as part of His Chastisement upon his sons:

“for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for *what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?* But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are you illegitimate, and not sons” (Heb. 12:6-8).

THE ANGELS AT WORK

Psalm 34 describes the Angels’ work, in harmony with what we have just considered:

“the Angel of Yahweh encampeth round about them that fear him, *and delivereth them*” (Psa. 34:7).

Notice the point here: the Angel does not prevent difficulties from coming, but will deliver out of those difficulties when they come. As it is written: “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tried above that ye are able, but will with the trial also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13). Indeed, the same Psalm describes: “*Many are the afflictions of the righteous:* but Yahweh delivereth him out of them all” (Psa. 34:19).

The allusion in this Psalm appears to be from Jacob's words concerning the Angelic hand in his own life:

“The Angel *which redeemed me from all evil*, bless the lads...” (Gen. 48:16).

When we consider the life of Jacob, we see a man who endured many adverse circumstances in his life – in his case, there is no question as to whether evil times had come. Jacob's faith was not that he be spared affliction: rather it was that Yahweh's Angel would deliver him out of it when it came.

Another case in point is the experiences of Daniel's three friends in the Truth, and their refusal to bow the knee to the Babylonian Idol. They were thrown into a fire so hot that it devoured the mightiest men of Babylon, yet were protected from harm, so that even the smell of the fire did not linger in their clothes. So Nebuchadnezzar recognised the means of divine protection: “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, *who hath sent his angel* and delivered his servants that trusted in him...” (Dan. 3:28). Again, the fiery trial was to come – it was not averted – but in the midst of it all, the Angel delivered them out of all evil.

PERCEIVING DIVINE MESSENGERS

When we consider the events of our lives, there are many instances where we might see the consequences of the Angels at work. There are probably myriads of other occasions where they were active, and we never knew. Only when in the kingdom might we be able to consider aspects of our past lives, where the Angelic hand was working, guiding our circumstances, and leading us out of temptations and trials. We must, however, see their operation through the eyes of faith, not doubting our ultimate deliverance at their hand.

2 Kings chapter 6 describes a man who at first, could not visualise the immortal messengers sent to deliver him. The king of Israel sought to kill Elisha and his servant:

“therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about” (2 Kings 6:14).

Humanly speaking, all was lost. How could two individuals possibly be expected to be victorious over a mighty and great army? So Elisha's servant exclaimed: “Alas, my master! How shall we do?” (2 Kings 6:15). He was, however, merely repeating the mistake of Israel of old, when they were commanded to go into the land. The “children of Anak” were there, who were strong and mighty – how could they possibly be expected to overcome? Again, a little later, the giant Philistine challenged Israel, whose king cowered in unfaithfulness.

So it was that Elisha showed the spirit of Caleb, and David: a sure confidence in the power of God in the matter:

“And he answered, Fear not, for that they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Yahweh, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see. And Yahweh opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha” (2 Kings 6:16-17).

The Angelic hand is often unseen – especially by men of the flesh. But in the words of Psalm 34, they encamped “round about” Elisha and his servant, and delivered them, as their antagonists were smitten with blindness, and were unable to find their way. Even so, we ought to have confidence that Yahweh is with us in our warfare against sin. Elisha's prayer to Yahweh is alluded to later in the New Testament: “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because *greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world*” (1 Jno. 4:4). Like Elisha's servant, we must have our spiritual eyes opened, recognising the great power that is for us, and which shall intimately effect our final deliverance from sin.

We read earlier that the angels are “ministering spirits” sent forth on the behalf of those who are “heirs of salvation” (Heb. 1:14). The application does not only refer to us: Messiah himself, as the heir in whom we obtain the inheritance, also needed, and experienced strength from Angels. Matthew chapter 4 describes his wilderness trials, ending: “then

the diabolos leaveth him and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him” (Mat. 4:11). At the time of his wrestling against his mortal nature in Gethsemane: “there appeared an Angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him” (Lu. 22:42). And again, whilst being crucified he spoke of how he had 12 legions of Angels at his disposal. The Master therefore, was One who recognised the hand of the Angels in his life – and we, therefore, must seek to have that same vision. Jacob, Caleb, David, Elisha, Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego and others still, all trusted in angelic deliverance in times of difficulty and adversity.

Messiah cried out to Yahweh in his distress: and that prayer was answered by the provision of an Angel. Hebrews chapter 4 describes how:

“in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplication with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared” (Heb. 5:7).

Notice the expression here: “... to save him from death...”. The Greek is more specific: “... to save him *out of* death ...”. The difference is this: if he was saved from death, he would not have died, he was saved from it. But the truth of the matter is that he did die – but he was raised up out of that death by the hand of the Father. As we showed earlier: Angelic ministration does not mean evil will not come, but will rather mean that we will be delivered from our trials – and the example of Christ himself is a case in point.

We began by showing how the Angels minister to the saints, particularly emphasising the way in which they deliver from evil. But it is written that “unto the Angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak” (Heb. 2:5). The earth will rather be given to Messiah and his glorified brethren. Christ and his saints will cause God’s Will to be performed as in the heavens above. We cited earlier the word of Messiah’s prayer: “... thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven” (Mat. 6:10). Obedience to the Will of Yahweh will be the ultimate objective in His coming Kingdom.

To conclude therefore: we have seen tremendous things from the Holy Writ, which have a very direct application to our lives. The Angel is there, and will deliver us out of all evil, according to the mercy and wisdom of our Eternal Father. Like Elijah, trusting the Angelic Host, we declare war with the flesh, both within and without, and can be confident of the victory. The Lord Jesus Christ himself needed Angelic deliverance, and his brethren, have a like need. In the future, Christ’s brethren will themselves have an angelic role, becoming part of Yahweh’s continually expanding glory. This is a position which we need to prepare for – and the only preparation is to search the Scriptures daily, and act upon the precepts revealed therein. This we do, both to see whether these things are so, and also to strengthen our vision of the coming kingdom, and our place within it.

Christopher Maddocks