

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE ANGELS?

Can they help us to understand ourselves and our world? Can we view them as "teachers," who show us how we should act in the presence and service of our Creator? What can we learn from their presence, their choices, their worship, their service, and their struggle with defecting rebel forces?

We have seen in our day a reawakening of belief in the unseen world. In the following pages, Herbert Vander Lugt leads us through an evaluative look at a race of beings who, according to the Bible, can teach us a lot about ourselves, our God, and our enemy.

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## LOOKING INTO THE SPIRIT WORLD

As the 1980s merged into the 1990s, the number one and number two bestsellers of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association were the fictional novels *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness* by Frank Peretti. Both books describe an ongoing struggle between angels and demons as they battle each other for influence over all those who dwell on the earth.

This interest in the spirit world is nothing new. People have always been fascinated by stories of invisible, supernatural beings who are involved in a celestial good-versus-evil struggle. All the major world religions--Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity--believe in the existence of angels who are organized in complex hierarchies of rank and function. The ancients developed complicated doctrines of angels. It is said that during the Scholastic Period, men of learning debated about the number of angels that could dance on the head of a pin.

The present interest in the invisible spirit world is also fueled by people who are connected with the New Age movement. Some claim to have personal "guides" or "channels" who enable them to enter into an altered state of consciousness or to contact the spirits of the dead. Some well-known people--the anthropologist Carlos Castaneda, the famous death-and-dying authority Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, the actress Shirley MacLaine--write and speak convincingly about spirit beings with whom they maintain contact and from whom they receive help.

This New Age emphasis on "unseen friends" is part of a world view that has permeated our society. Books on channeling, crystals, visualizations, reincarnation, and astrology are flooding the market and are being viewed with respect. These ideas sometimes even filter into the classrooms of our public schools. Some teachers have followed the procedure outlined by the psychic William W. Hewitt to show children how they can invite spirit beings to be their helpers. He says they can construct in their minds a "psychic workshop" to "experience communication with a dead person." He follows with these instructions:

In this session you will meet your two advisors. Now mentally say, "I welcome my advisor into my workshop. Please enter and sit in your chair." . . . Greet your male advisor. Thank him for coming . . . . Now, mentally say, "I welcome my female advisor into my workshop." (*Beyond Hypnosis: A Program for Developing Your Healing and Psychic Power*, William W. Hewitt, St. Paul, MN, Llewellyn Publications, 1990, pp.84,144,152,154,177).

Later in his book this same author instructs his students to make contact with "the Master of all Masters."

While relatively few children are actually being exposed to such a disturbing program, the fact that it has occurred should alert parents to the potential danger. Although we have no solid basis to speak of a "New Age conspiracy," we should recognize that thousands of people today claim that through hypnosis and mind-altering drugs they have been able to make genuine contact with spirit beings, who become very real to them. The "experiences" they relate are highly convincing. And multitudes have been greatly influenced by them.

In many ways, those who recognize the authority and perspectives of the Bible should not be surprised at such developments. From cover to cover, the Bible describes the activities of unseen spirits who have a long history of interacting with our human race.

What the Bible makes clear, however, is that the subject of angels calls for a good deal of discernment and caution. The unseen world can either be harmful or helpful. Therefore, it needs to be treated not merely as an intriguing curiosity, but as an unseen society from which we have much to learn.

## **WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE ANGELS?**

The Bible contains more than a series of alleged "angelic sightings." It offers an evaluative look into a world beyond the reach of scientific examination. When we study what it says about angels, we learn that: [\(1\) We are not alone](#), [\(2\) We are helped by unseen friends](#), [\(3\) We are opposed by invisible foes](#), [\(4\) Choice determines destiny](#), [\(5\) Nearness to God produces worship](#), [\(6\) Worship of God inspires service](#), and [\(7\) Serving God brings joy](#).

### **What Can We Learn From the Angels?**

#### **WE ARE NOT ALONE**

The Bible repeatedly maintains that human beings are not the only intelligent, moral creatures in the universe. The words *angel* and *angels* occur about 300 times. The Bible speaks often of Satan and demons, and refers to them as real, though not flesh-and-blood, earth-bound creatures like we are (Eph. 6:12). It names two angels--Michael (Dan. 12:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7) and Gabriel (Dan. 8:16; Luke 1:19). It gives us graphic portrayals of

heavenly beings called "seraphim" (Is. 6:2,3), "cherubim" (Ezek. 10:1-20), and "living creatures" (Ezek. 1:5-22; Rev. 4:6-11).

The Bible is filled with references to spirit beings who possess intelligence and moral qualities. This shows us that we are not alone. Many scientists picture us as the only thinking and choosing beings in a vast universe--products of an inexplicable series of chance happenings over billions of years. But this isn't what the Bible says. It tells us that God created both the visible and the invisible worlds and everything and everyone in them (Gen. 1:1; Is. 40:26; Col. 1:16; Rev. 4:11).

So, according to the Bible, we are not alone! We are not orphans in a hostile universe. We were created by the living God of the Bible. He is spirit (John 4:24) and is present with us at all times (Ps. 139). And in the spirit world with Him are myriads of living creatures who can make an impact on us for either good or bad.

### **What Can We Learn From the Angels?**

#### **WE ARE HELPED BY UNSEEN FRIENDS**

The Bible says that there are angels who help us. These angels are our unseen friends. The writer of Hebrews, referring to angels, asked the rhetorical question, "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" (1:14). The answer is yes. And they are normally invisible because they are spirits. They do not have physical bodies. Therefore, they can move quickly from the spirit world to our physical world to help us.

In the Bible, angels sometimes appear in the form of men as they did to Abraham (Gen. 18) and to the followers of Jesus at the tomb from which He had risen (Mark 16:5; John 20:12). The writer of Hebrews encourages us to be hospitable to strangers because "some have unwittingly entertained angels" (Heb. 13:2).

Do angels still appear in human form to help us? On the basis of our own experience, most of us would not be able to give a conclusive answer. But many of us have heard Christians tell of experiences in which they saw an angel in human form.

The late Dr. Raymond Edman, formerly the president and chancellor of Wheaton College, was convinced that an angel appeared to him when he was a young missionary. He was in his front yard, discouraged and depressed, when an elderly woman who was walking by stopped, spoke words of encouragement and challenge to him, and then started to walk away. Stirred by what she said, he went into the house to tell his wife. But before he could say anything, Mrs. Edman said, "Why don't you invite that woman in for lunch?" He ran out to stop her, but she was gone. He could see a great distance in both directions, but she was nowhere to be seen. He asked his neighbors if they had seen her, but they had not. To the end of his life, Dr. Edman believed that this woman was an angel in human form sent by God to help in a moment of great need.

This is not an isolated instance. I recently heard a missionary tell how a man suddenly appeared when she was in a dangerous situation, guided her, and then disappeared. She thinks he may have been an angel.

What should we do with such reports? One thing is sure: We can't use them as proof to skeptics that angels exist. These Christians could have been mistaken in thinking these visitors were angels. But we must also recognize the possibility that they were correct. Dr. Edman was a highly regarded and well-educated Christian. And so is the missionary who reported her encounter. Angels appeared in this manner in the past. It's possible they're doing so today.

We cannot prove or disprove the accounts of angels appearing to our contemporaries in human form. But if they are accurate, we must recognize that such appearances have always been the exception, not the rule. And these appearances leave many unanswered questions. An angel fed Elijah (1 Kin. 19:5-7), protected Daniel from hungry lions (Dan. 6:22), and freed Peter from prison (Acts 12:7-10). But we don't know what form they took. All we know is that the angel who freed Peter was accompanied by a great light and that he disappeared when the apostle was outside the prison.

It is entirely possible that angels usually remain completely invisible when they carry out their work for us. They cannot be seen when they carry the soul of a dying believer to heaven as they did Lazarus (Luke 16:22), or when they protect God's children from harm (Ps. 91:11), or when they watch us in our worship (1 Cor. 11:1-10), or when they observe us living out our salvation (1 Tim. 5:21).

The fact that Psalm 91:11 depicts angels keeping us from harm, coupled with our Lord's warning "Do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father" (Matt. 18:10), has led some to teach that each Christian has a guardian angel. But to make this claim is to go beyond what Jesus said. His statement certainly assures us that we have angels who work in our behalf, but it does not necessarily declare that there is one assigned angel for every person. It may be, but not necessarily. However, this should not trouble us. God can and will look after each one of us individually. He certainly has enough angels available if He chooses to use them to protect or help us. Myriads of these heavenly beings are our friends and stand ready to be our helpers and protectors.

Perhaps it is safe to say that they usually help and protect us without becoming visible. Consider the story of Elisha and his servant recorded in 2 Kings 6. The servant was frightened when he saw a large enemy army surrounding the city of Dothan where they were staying. He didn't know that God had placed an army of angels between these human soldiers and the inhabitants of the city. But when Elisha offered the petition, "Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see" (2 Kin. 6:17), the servant saw the angelic host.

Our angel friends may be unseen, but according to the Bible they are all around us. God uses them as His servants to protect and help "those who will inherit salvation" (Heb. 1:14).

## **What Can We Learn From the Angels?**

### **WE ARE OPPOSED BY INVISIBLE FOES**

As we learn what the Bible says about angels, we also discover that we have enemies in the spirit world. A large number of evil spirits hate God. This hatred motivates these demons to do all they can to frustrate His loving purposes for mankind. The Bible refers to the devil as our adversary (1 Pet. 5:8) and our enemy (Matt. 13:39), and pictures his followers as an organized and powerful army (Eph. 6:12).

Let's now look at what these demons do, and then at what we can do to counterattack and defeat them.

### **WHAT THEY DO**

**1. *They oppose God and His people.*** Under their leader Satan (this proper name means "adversary"), they do all they can to keep God from carrying out His plans and purposes. The devil is our "adversary" (1 Pet. 5:8), the "enemy" (Matt. 13:39), the head of a vast host of evil beings against whom we must "wrestle" (Eph. 6:12).

**2. *They slander God and His people.*** Under their leader the devil ("slanderer"), they do all they can to cast doubt on God's character (Gen. 3:1-5) and that of His people (Job 1:9-11; Rev. 12:10).

**3. *They deceive the unsaved and try to deceive Christians.*** Satan "deceives the whole world" (Rev. 12:9), blinds the eyes of those who do not believe (2 Cor. 4:4), uses "lying spirits" (2 Chron. 18:21,22), and sends "deceiving spirits" who promote "doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1).

**4. *They plant evil thoughts into the minds of people.*** Satan put it into David's mind to take a census of his people, undoubtedly motivated by pride (1 Chron. 21:1). He was behind Peter's rebuke of Christ for announcing His approaching suffering and crucifixion (Matt. 16:22,23). He filled the mind of Judas with thoughts that led him to betray Christ (Luke 22:3; John 13:2). He was involved in the lying done by Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:3). Demons played a large role in the mental processes of the false teachers described in 2 Peter 2:1,2,10,13,14,18.

**5. *They take over the personality of some people.*** Demons made two men in Gergesa so fierce that people avoided the region (Matt. 8:28). They caused such severe convulsions in a boy that he often hurt himself as he fell (Matt. 17:14-21). Their sinister purpose in taking control is indicated by the terms used to describe them: "unclean spirits" (Matt. 10:1) and "evil spirits" (Luke 7:21).

**6. *They influence national leaders.*** The devil, who is the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and the "god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4), used "a lying spirit" to lead

King Ahab to his death (1 Kin. 22:20-23,37,38), assigned a spirit being to control the leader of Persia (Dan. 10:10-21), and will through demons lead armies of humans to fight against God and be slaughtered in the war of Armageddon (Rev. 16:13-16).

**7. *They play a role in human illnesses.*** Demons caused some to be mute (Matt. 9:32-33; 12:22), blind (Matt. 12:22), deformed (Luke 13:11-17), convulsive (Matt. 17:15-19), and insane (Luke 8:27-29). Satan brought on Job's physical affliction (Job 2:6-8). Even if he doesn't bring on the affliction, as in the case of Paul's thorn, he may use the illness as his "messenger" of discouragement (2 Cor. 12:7).

**8. *They try to pervert the doctrine of grace.*** Paul referred to rules that forbid marriage and the eating of certain foods as coming from "seducing spirits" and called these regulations "doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1-5). In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul expressed his concern that the devil through his craftiness may corrupt the minds of believers from the "simplicity that is in Christ." This was a reference to the teachings of those who insisted on circumcision and dietary restrictions as essential to salvation. It is in this context that he said Satan "transforms himself into an angel of light" (v.14). The devil and his followers hate the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith plus nothing.

**9. *They try to distort the biblical view of Jesus Christ.*** This fact lies behind the apostle John's warning to "test the spirits, whether they are of God . . . Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God" (1 John 4:1-3).

In John's day, men who claimed that they spoke by inspiration, maybe even crediting their words to a spirit being, were saying disturbing things about Jesus Christ. It appears that they were denying He had possessed a genuine flesh-and-blood human body. They probably said that He only appeared to have a real body, that His perceived humanity was in reality an apparition. They did this because they wanted to hold to the Greek philosophical concept that matter is essentially evil and that spirit is essentially good. But in denying the genuine humanity of Jesus, the reality of His physical body, they were also rejecting basic doctrines like the incarnation, the atonement, and the bodily resurrection.

For a person to confess that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" was an acknowledgment that the man from Nazareth was none other than the incarnate Christ--that He, through the virgin birth, came in a human body. The words "has come in the flesh" are in the perfect tense, which means "has come in the flesh with the result that even now in His resurrection body He is genuinely human."

Evil spirits are always at work trying to distort the biblical portrayal of Jesus Christ. They probably think the best way to do so is to speak well of Him but to come short of the full truth. For example, Muslims speak of Him as a great prophet. New Agers refer to Him as an Enlightened One in the spirit realm. Jews refer to Him as a great teacher.

Jehovah's Witnesses call Him a son of God, and Mormons see Him as a Savior and Revealer. But you won't hear them confessing Jesus to be the God-man, the incarnate Deity who came to reveal God and provide salvation for sinful mankind. It is therefore

important that we "test the spirits" as we listen to religious teachers. If they deny Jesus Christ as the eternal God-man, they are receiving their instructions from evil spirits, not from God.

## **HOW WE CAN COUNTERATTACK**

Knowing what the enemy aims to do and how he executes his plan can be a liability. It can do nothing more than increase our fear and apprehension. But it is beneficial if we use the information to build a good defense and to strategize a counterattack. The apostle James gave the following plan: "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Wanting to do God's will, humbly submitting to Him, and resisting the devil in God's strength is the prescription for victory. According to Paul in Ephesians 6:11-18, we must also have on certain pieces of military equipment--"the whole armor of God." Let's look at each element of this armor and what it means to us in our battle against "the wiles of the devil."

- ***The belt of truth.*** Since Satan and his demons depend on deceit to maintain their power, our first line of defense is always to be truthful. We must never distort or misrepresent the truth, regardless of any advantage we might gain by doing so.
- ***The breastplate of righteousness.*** Any sin in our life leaves us open to demonic attack. Even though we are given the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21), we must still continually put on the protection of holy living.
- ***The shoes of the gospel of peace.*** With our feet firmly planted on the truth that we are at peace with God, we can stand resolutely against Satan's attacks.
- ***The shield of faith.*** In order to quench the "fiery darts" of Satan's temptations, we must trust and believe what God's Word says about every area of our life.
- ***The helmet of salvation.*** This is the confidence that there is coming in the future a great victory celebration. It's also referred to as the "hope of salvation" (1 Thess. 5:8). This helmet protects us against Satan's two-edged sword of discouragement and doubt.
- ***The sword of the Spirit.*** Since the Word of God is the basis of our faith, we need to learn how to wield it with authority. Scripture is our best offensive weapon against the devil (Matt. 4:1-11).

After he described the various elements of the armor, Paul said that we are to be in constant prayer. Prayer expresses our dependence on God. We can fight against Satan and his demons only "in the [strength of the] Lord and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10). In the power of Christ with the armor of the Spirit, we will be victors.

## **[What Can We Learn From the Angels?](#)**

### **CHOICE DETERMINES DESTINY**

From our biblical study of the angels we learn that choice determines destiny. The Bible shows us that the devil and his followers were once good angels. But when God gave

them an opportunity to choose either to give Him their full allegiance or to exalt themselves, they chose to forsake Him.

Many Bible scholars, though recognizing that Isaiah 14 is directed to the king of Babylon, are convinced that the language goes beyond this earthly monarch to Satan and his fall. He is the Lucifer who, though created sinless, rebelled against God and tried to usurp God's place in the universe.

How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High." Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit (Is. 14:12-15).

Another passage that speaks of the bad choice made by the angel who is now known as Satan is Ezekiel 28:12-17. In this message directed to the king of Tyre, the prophet used language that transcends the earthly monarch and points to Satan, the source of all human sin. "You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you. . . . Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty" (vv.15,17). Pride must have been the reason for the fall of this high-ranking angel.

The symbolism of Revelation 12:4 portrays Satan as a great dragon who drags a third of the stars down from heaven with his tail. This may indicate that a third of the angels joined him in his rebellion and that the devil is now the leader of a vast host of evil spirit beings.

Lucifer and those who followed him made one bad choice--one that determined their destiny. As far as we know, they were never given an opportunity to repent. Very likely, they have never wanted to repent. They are now the evil angels, the company of invisible spirit beings for whom hell was created (Matt. 25:41).

The fact that one bad choice made these angels evil, hell-bound creatures is sobering indeed. But we are treated less severely. We can often rectify a bad choice or a series of bad choices. We can repent of our sin. And we must remember that people who have lived in rebellion against God all their lives are sometimes converted to Christ just before they die. Think of the criminal crucified with Jesus Christ! (Luke 23:39-43).

Yes, it is true that God graciously forgives and receives people who turn to Him in repentance and faith after having made bad choices. But no one should let this fact lead to presumption. If someone knows the truth but coldly rejects it with the idea that he can always change his mind later, he may be sealing his doom. The bad choice he makes to reject the truth at one point in time may not be reversible. God will not change. And His grace will not change. But that person may never have the desire to change in the future.

God seems to have established the principle that the closer someone is to God and His truth, the more disastrous will be the consequences of the bad choice. Angels were created sinless. They lived in heaven, in the immediate presence of God. Lucifer, who apparently was a leader among the angels, chose to exalt himself and rebel against God. A large number of angels joined him in his rebellion. God's judgment was swift and severe as He cast them out of heaven. This event is recorded in Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:11-19. Because these heavenly beings lived so close to God, God gave them only one choice.

God graciously gives humans more than one opportunity. He sees us as having inherited a sinful nature. Unlike the angels who before they sinned lived in heaven, we dwell on an imperfect planet. Unlike the angels who before their fall saw God's glory firsthand, we see "in a mirror, dimly" (1 Cor. 13:12) in nature and in conscience (Ps. 8,19; Rom. 1:18-20; 2:14,15) and (because of our human failings) even in His Word. God is patient with us. He "remembers that we are dust" (Ps. 103:14).

The Lord has shown us, however, that we must not presume on His patience. The Bible speaks of a "hardening" and a "blinding" that occurs when people deliberately reject Him and boldly refuse to obey Him. We see this in the well-known story of Pharaoh and the ten plagues (Ex. 5-12). This Egyptian king was haughty, arrogant, and belligerent when Moses told him that God wanted him to let the Israelites leave their tasks and hold a festival of praise to Jehovah (Ex. 5). His response was to make the slavery of the Israelites even more intolerable than it had been.

In the biblical account of this struggle between Pharaoh and Moses, God said that He would "harden" Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 4:21; 7:3). Eventually He did "harden" the heart of the king (9:12). We also encounter the simple declaration that Pharaoh's heart "became hard" or "was hardened," ascribing the phenomenon to neither God nor Pharaoh. In addition, we're also told explicitly that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (8:15; 9:34). This king, in the face of a demand that came with authenticating signs, said no to God. When he did this, he hardened his heart, set in motion a natural process by which his heart became increasingly hard, and caused God to send upon him a judicial hardening.

The more direct the encounter with God, the greater the responsibility to obey, and the greater the likelihood that a hardening process will keep a person from repenting.

The Lord Jesus also expressed this principle. He warned the religious leaders repeatedly that their stubborn refusal to believe on Him in spite of the miracles they saw Him perform, and the truth they heard from His lips, would lead to their eternal doom. They went so far as to say that He cast demons out of people by the power of Satan. Our Lord, who indicated that He did so by the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:27,28), warned them that they were in danger of committing "blasphemy against the Spirit" (v.31), a sin that cannot be forgiven.

A short time later, a few days before His crucifixion, Jesus addressed the same group of religious leaders. He said, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you

have the light, lest darkness overtake you . . . . While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light" (John 12:35,36). The apostle John told us that after saying this, Jesus departed and hid Himself from these leaders. In doing this, He acted out a warning similar to that expressed by Isaiah (6:9,10; 29:12) and freely quoted by John, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts" (John 12:40).

When people deliberately and repeatedly reject God, they are in danger of hardening their hearts. Paul spoke of the "god of this age" blinding the minds of those "who do not believe" to keep them from receiving Christ as their Savior (2 Cor. 4:4). Those who keep rejecting the truth will also find themselves becoming increasingly drawn toward deceit. They will gradually become more and more insensitive to God's Word.

From the angels we learn that the closer one is to God when he rejects Him, the greater the danger of a swift hardening process. Choice determines destiny. One choice determined the destiny of the angels. One choice can also determine ours.

### [What Can We Learn From the Angels?](#)

#### **NEARNESS TO GOD PRODUCES WORSHIP**

We learn from the angels that for those who love God, nearness to Him produces worship. In Hebrews 1:14, the good angels, the ones who didn't join in the rebellion led by Lucifer, are called "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation." The expression, *ministering spirits* in the Greek uses a term that refers to the ceremonial activities of priests and to public service "exclusively of religious and ritual services both in a wider and more restricted sense" (Arndt and Gingrich, p.471). It is service with God in mind. In this context, Hebrews 1:14 could be properly translated, "Are they not all *worshiping* spirits sent forth to serve?"

The good angels worship naturally and spontaneously because they are filled with awe, reverence, and love as they observe God's glory, love, and power. Around the throne of God they "do not rest day or night, saying, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to

When angels saw the birth of Christ and knew that God had miraculously become a member of the human family to bring salvation to mankind, they shouted, "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:14). When they saw the glorified Son of God and realized that He had gone through death to bring salvation to sinners, they said, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev. 5:12). When they saw God creating our world, they "shouted for joy" (Job 38:7). As holy angels who are close to God, they can't help but worship Him.

It appears from this that we can establish a principle: The closer we who have chosen to believe in God live to Him, the more spontaneously and enthusiastically we will worship Him. Consider what happened to the godly people of the Bible when God came close to them and they had a vivid sense of His presence: Jacob (Gen. 28:16, 17), Moses (Ex. 34:8), Isaiah (Is. 6:5), Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:28), Daniel (Dan. 10:8,9), the apostle Paul (2 Cor.

12:1-4), the apostle John (Rev. 1:17). When we live obediently and pray sincerely, we will sense God's presence in our lives. Then worship will come naturally. We will worship in private and look forward to worshipping Him with others. We will feel empathy with David who wrote, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord' " (Ps. 122:1).

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#### **WORSHIP OF GOD INSPIRES SERVICE**

From angels we also learn that worship leads to willing, God-honoring service. As noted in the previous point, the Hebrews 1:14 declaration that angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister" probably would be better translated "worshiping spirits sent forth to serve." In the Bible, angels are a joyful group, always eager and ready to do God's bidding. They rejoiced at God's creation of our earth system (Job 38:7). This combination of worship with readiness to serve is expressed by the psalmist, "Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word. Bless the Lord, all you His hosts, you ministers of His, who do His pleasure" (Ps. 103:20,21).

The angels are a worshiping community. They serve God with readiness, zeal, and conscious dependence on Him. They never appear reluctant to do His bidding. Their service, which flows from their worship, has in it the element of gratitude. They know that God could do without them. They know that He can do anything He wants to do by direct command. They know that it was because of His love that He created them, and it is because He loves them that He uses them to carry out His will. This makes them not only eager to serve but also causes them to be humble.

Michael, the only heavenly being given the title "archangel," showed humble respect for the devil when the two had a dispute about the body of Moses. Perhaps Satan, with the hope that it would become an object of worship, wanted it to be found by the Israelites. Whatever the point of the dispute, Michael "dared not bring against him [Satan] a reviling accusation, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!' " (Jude 9). His God-consciousness gave him humility in his service.

The angels show us that nearness to God produces worship, and that this worship inspires willing, eager, and humble service.

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#### **SERVING GOD BRINGS JOY**

The angels also teach us that the right kind of service brings joy. The fact that God keeps them busily serving Him enhances their joy. The Bible says that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10). Their joy is evident in their words of praise throughout the book of Revelation. And Hebrews 12:22 states that those who believe on Jesus Christ will stand with "thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly" (NIV). Their grateful, humble, willing service gives them great joy.

The Bible also gives us many indications that gladness comes to us when we serve the Lord. The words *glad* and *gladness* are used more than 100 times in the Bible, often to describe God's people and to tell what they feel when they worship and serve the Lord. Add to this the many instances when the terms *joy* and *rejoicing* are used in the same way, and we have a wonderful picture: Those who serve God with gratitude and praise will be happy people.

## **THE ANGEL OF THE LORD**

In the Old Testament we find numerous references to a heavenly messenger called "the Angel of the Lord." Twice He helped Hagar, the Egyptian slave girl, as she tried to find her way through the wilderness (Gen. 16:7; 21:17). He called from heaven, stopping Abraham as he was about to sacrifice Isaac on an altar (Gen. 22:11,12) and then spoke again, assuring the patriarch of God's covenant blessings (Gen. 22:15-18). He spoke to Abraham again in connection with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:1-19:1).

He accompanied Eliezer on his journey to Haran for Isaac's bride (Gen. 24:7,40). He appeared to Jacob, identifying Himself as the God of Bethel (Gen. 31:11-13). He wrestled with Jacob, drawing from this old warrior the declaration, "I have seen God face to face" (Gen. 32:24-30).

He spoke to Moses (Ex. 3:2-6), guided and guarded the Israelites (Ex. 13:21,22; 14:19), appeared to the prophet Balaam (Num. 22:22), declared Himself to be the "Commander of the army of the Lord" (Josh. 5:14,15). He spoke to the Israelites at Bochim (Judg. 2:1-5), to Gideon (Judg. 6:11-14), to Samson's parents (Judg. 13), and to David at the threshing floor of Ornan, where He also stopped a destroying angel (1 Chron. 21:15, 18,27).

He ministered to Elijah when he was fleeing from Jezebel (1 Kin. 19:5,7) and spoke to him on other occasions (2 Kin. 1:3,15). He killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night (2 Kin. 19:35). He appeared as an authority figure in Zechariah 1:10, receiving a report from angels who patrolled the earth (Zech. 1:11).

Who is this Angel? All agree that He stands out among the angels and sometimes identifies Himself with God when He speaks. Some Bible scholars affirm that He is an angel through whom God manifested Himself in a unique way. Others are convinced that this Angel was the second person of the Trinity, making Himself visible long before He became a human baby who was born of the virgin Mary. That is why He could let Abraham call Him Lord and could speak with the authority of God (Gen. 18:16-33). That is why He could refer to His name as "wonderful," allow Samson's parents to offer a sacrifice to Him, and let them think they would die because they had seen God (Judg. 13:3-23). This perhaps also accounts for the fact that His appearances sometimes were terrifying and awesome--very similar to the portrayal of Christ in Revelation 1:12-19.

We believe "the Angel of the Lord" in the Old Testament is indeed the second person of the Trinity. He, who is depicted in John 1:1 as the eternal Word, kept in close touch with

His people during the Old Testament era. He appeared in human form. He spoke face to face with people. He showed them again and again that they were the objects of His love and care. Therefore the prophet could say, "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old" (Is. 63:9).

We today do not need such visible tokens of His love, power, and presence. The New Testament Scriptures tell us the story of God's coming to earth in the person of Jesus Christ to show us what He is like, to prove His love, and to provide salvation. The Holy Spirit will use this record to make God and His presence very real to us if we read it, believe it, and obey it.

## **THE PREEMINENCE OF JESUS CHRIST**

A little more than 20 years ago, the French Bible scholar Jean Hering made the following prediction:

The day is not far distant when only the New Testament doctrine of angels will form a barrier against certain gnostic or "religious" movements which, intentionally or otherwise, run the risk of making many believers fall back into the cult of angels, dominions, and "elements" (quoted in *The Message of Hebrews* by Raymond Brown, IVP, 1982).

This is a warning that we should pay attention to. In most cases, Christians are well enough informed to reject occultism, spiritism, astral healing, eastern mysticism, and other belief systems that are explicitly condemned in the Scriptures. However, the prominence of these beliefs and practices in our society has made an impact on the Christian community. Many believers are beginning to focus their attention on "spirit world" teaching. They place an emphasis on how to put the good angels to work for them. And they have developed formulas to cast out demons and defeat the devil.

The problem with this kind of teaching is that so little of it is drawn from the Scriptures. Experience takes precedence over the Bible. But an even greater problem with teaching that is preoccupied with the spirit world is that not enough emphasis is given to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul warned the believers in Colosse about false teachers who, in the guise of humility, said that we should be content to worship angels rather than thinking we have the right to enter the presence of God, the Ultimate One. The apostle said that such a teacher "goes into great detail about what he has seen" (Col. 2:18 NIV). But in his emphasis on his experiences, he "has lost connection with the Head" (v.19 NIV). This lack of vital contact with Jesus Christ cuts a person off from the One who is the source of spiritual life and growth. Jesus Christ must be kept preeminent. He is to be worshiped as God. Angels are to be recognized as creatures--spirit beings created by God to worship and serve Him.

Hebrews 1:4-14 beautifully delineates the preeminence of Christ over the angels. He is the Son to whom all the angels are to give their worship (vv.5,6). He is called "God," and His throne is "forever and ever," while angels are created beings and His servants (vv.7-9). He existed from all eternity, will never change, and sits enthroned in heaven, whereas angels are "ministering spirits" who are sent out by Him to serve "those who will inherit salvation" (vv.10-14).

Jesus Christ is the Preeminent One. He is the Head of the church (Col. 2:18,19). He is worshiped by angels (Rev. 5:11,12). Someday every human, every good angel, and every demon will acknowledge Christ's supremacy (Phil. 2:10). Let's make Him preeminent in our lives today!

## **THINKING ABOUT IT**

Is it necessary to believe in angels? The Bible mentions angels extensively (over 250 times) from Genesis to Revelation. Not only did Jesus refer to angels in His teaching, but the New Testament records that angels were present at Jesus' birth, resurrection, and ascension. Angels also ministered to Him after His temptation by Satan in the wilderness and in the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to His arrest and crucifixion. Belief in the Bible, then, necessitates belief in the spirit world.

You may believe in angels but have never understood how knowing what God's Word says about them applies to your life. We hope this booklet has shown you that there are practical truths we can discover by learning more about them.

Are you searching for answers to questions about the reality of the spirit world? Instead of reading all the books that deal with this subject, consider what the Bible says about Jesus Christ. He existed in the spirit world as the eternal God. But 2,000 years ago He entered the physical world as a man to pay the penalty for our sin--death. He lived a perfect life and became our substitute when He was crucified on the cross. Then He rose from the dead to provide eternal life for all who would put their trust in Him. The apostle John wrote, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12). Put your trust in Christ. Angels serve Him, so should you.

## **DEFINING OUR TERMS**

**Angel**--(lit. "messenger") is a spirit being created by God to worship and serve Him.

**Angel of the Lord**--the Old Testament "messenger" believed by many to be a preincarnate manifestation of Jesus Christ (\*).

**Cherubim**--a high-ranking order of angels who function as guardians of the holiness of God.

**Christ**--the second person of the triune God who, as Creator of the angels, deserves and receives their worship.

**Demons, evil angels**--those angels who sinned when given the opportunity; now confirmed in evil, they hate and oppose God and His people.

**Demon possession**--a phenomenon that occurs when a demon or demons take over the control of a human personality.

**Devil, Satan, Lucifer**--the leader of the evil angels who rebelled against God.

**Gabriel**--other than Michael, he is the only named holy angel in Scripture; he brought messages from God to several key individuals.

**Holy angels**--those angels who faced an opportunity to choose between good and evil, made the right choice, and now are beyond being tempted.

**Michael**--the only angel given the highest rank of archangel; he appears as the guardian angel of Israel.

**Occultic activity**--efforts to contact the spirit world, either celestial beings or the spirits of the dead.

**Seraphim**--an order of angels who attend the throne of God.