

How Angels Minister Today

Hanging in my grandmother's house was a picture that has left a lasting impact on me. It was titled "The Guardian," and it featured a very large angel with a comforting expression and outreached hands hovering near a small boy and girl as they walked over a precariously dangerous bridge.

The simple framed print brought great comfort and security to my heart when I was a little girl and propelled my imaginative mind into the awesome arena of angels. In recent years, the study of angels has continued to bring me much comfort and encouragement.

Angels have often been relegated to the shimmer and shine of Christmas, but actually they have been involved with God and His purposes since the dawn of creation. Wherever God is—and He fills every crack and crevice of the universe—you will find angels.

In my opinion, the evangelical world has underemphasized the ministry of angels. They are never to be our primary focus, but what overwhelming encouragement to be keenly aware of the myriad of angels who can be sent to minister to the children of God!

Angels, the Scriptures tell us, are innumerable (Heb. 12:22). There are "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" of them (Rev. 5:11). I have been told by people more proficient in math than I am that there are possibly a 100 trillion angels!

What Are Angels?

Angels are inhabitants of the heavenlies—a part of the eternal yet connected to time. They are celestial beings created by God whose principal purpose is to serve Him and help carry out His purposes in the heavens and the earth.

Angels are described in the Bible as mighty, strong, glorious, fearsome, wise and flaming. They move swiftly from place to place. They fight. They shout. They speak. They go before. They go behind. They can bless. They can destroy. They move through lightning, thunder, storms, earthquakes, hailstones and fire.

Angels are fierce enough to make a king tremble (2 Sam. 24:16-17) and tender enough to bring comfort (Gen. 21:17). They have tremendous power because they are propelled by God's Word, but their supernatural abilities are enlisted only at God's command, as we see in Psalm 103:20: "Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word."

It is almost mind-boggling to realize that these powerful beings are sent to minister to us—mere mortals yet the heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14). But it's true! This knowledge should bring us wonderful comfort and assurance.

To *minister* means "to serve, care for, attend to, help, aid, assist, relieve, comfort, console, accommodate, befriend." What more could we need on this, the earthly track of our heavenly journey?

Angels as Ministers

Because the invasion of a spiritual entity into our material world is generally unexpected, angels often try to allay fear when they first make their presence known to humans, as these biblical examples show:

"Do not be afraid, Zacharias'" (Luke 1:13).

"Do not be afraid, Mary'" (Luke 1:30).

"Do not be afraid, Paul'" (Acts 27:24).

From that point, their duties—the purposes for which God sends them—are varied.

Paul mentions that the angels observe us (1 Cor. 4:9). They are busy with involvement in the traffic flow of life. They can arrange appointments, as one did in helping Abraham's servant find Rebekah (Gen. 24:7). They can give directions, as they did to cause Philip to intersect with the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-27). They can impart confidence, as one did with Gideon (Judg. 6:12).

Angels can find and minister to a rejected woman such as Hagar in a wilderness of bitter despair (Gen. 16:7-10); deliver a promise to a young woman, Mary, in the obscure village of Nazareth (Luke 1:26-33); or bring a message of comfort to an aging saint named Alma Nolan, in Minden, La.

As had been Alma Nolan's habit for many years, she knelt at the little vanity bench in her bedroom to pray before retiring. A widow living alone, she always closed her prayer with this request: "Lord, send Your angels to watch over me through the night. In Jesus' name, amen."

Turning to get up from her knees, she was startled to see a big man standing in her bedroom doorway, leaning against the doorjamb. Her mind raced to check the doors and windows, which she knew were all securely locked. Fearfully she stammered, "Wh-wh-who are you?"

With a warm, confident gaze, he replied, "You asked for me to come, didn't you?"

In a moment of distraction, she looked away, and when she turned back again, he was gone. The daily invisible had become visible to a precious saint of God for a few moments. Prayer request granted!

Without technical assistance, an angel was able to locate a man named Paul in the midst of a storm (Acts 27:23-24); direct Joseph in the protection of Mary and the young boy Jesus (Matt. 2:13); and suddenly awaken my husband, a thousand miles

away, to cover me and our children with prayer at the very moment a tornado was moving toward our house.

The presence of angels was reassuring to Jacob when he was concerned about facing his estranged brother (Gen. 32:1-2).

Both Peter and Paul, when in isolating circumstances—one deep in prison, one lost on a raging sea—were visited by an angel (Acts 12:3-8; 27:21-24). Did the angel find these men in their dire circumstances, or was the angel already there keeping watch over them?

All these incidents had one thing in common: There was more involved than what men could see with their physical eyes. Angels were there, ready to fight, to comfort, to deter, to rescue, to aid, to reassure, to deliver, to keep and to preserve. Think about it! Those involved did not know it, but angelic assistance was at the ready, just waiting to be revealed.

We are never out of range of God and His angels. In a dream, Jacob saw the angels coming and going between heaven and earth on a ladder (Gen. 28:10-12).

A ladder is for quick access. It can be set up anywhere. So the angels can come to us wherever we are, as they are coming and going from the throne room of the presence of God. What a connection!

Our daughter, Teri, discovered this truth firsthand. She spent many years at home alone with her children, Shane and Shannon, while her husband, Steve, traveled in evangelistic ministry. She found that nights can be very lonesome, especially in times of distress.

In just such a time, Teri ended her day with tearful prayers. Drifting off to sleep, she was jolted awake by the sound of footsteps on the small deck at the back of her mobile home. Fear came first, followed by a calming peace.

The footsteps did not stop at the deck but came on into the kitchen, through the dining room, through the living room and down the hall to her bedroom. Teri realized God had sent an angel to comfort and protect her and her family. She fell into a peaceful sleep.

As long as Steve continued to travel, the angel returned occasionally, following the same path—outside on the deck, through the house and into Teri's bedroom. Whenever she heard him, Teri's worries would subside, and she would fall asleep in peace.

Prayer Connection

We live in a material world of things we can see, touch and sense in our physical beings. But just beyond a tissue-thin veil is the spiritual world where angels are very real and very busy.

Occasionally the physical eyes are opened to see the reality of an angel, but often angels do their work undetected by the human eye. Oh, what an awesome sight would confront us if we could see as Elisha's servant saw (2 Kings 6:15-17)!

I am convinced we would behold an almost unbelievable number of angels going and coming between the two worlds. And in our immediate surroundings we would see many angels watching, listening, observing, guarding, guiding, moving like the wind at the impulse of God's commands concerning us and our prayers.

We may feel very detached from the ethereal world in which the angels live, but we are so easily connected. Prayer is our line of communication from the material world in which we live to that invisible realm in which God and His angels dwell. If you review all the incidents of angelic involvement, whether biblical or contemporary, you will discover that prayer is usually the catalyst for enlisting the assistance of angels.

All our prayers are to be directed to God, never to angels. Not only is there a scriptural warning against worshiping angels (Col. 2:18), but prayers to angels would be useless because angels receive commands from God alone and move only according to His word.

I am convinced there is no way to separate angelic activity from the workings of God. Abraham, Daniel, Cornelius and the Jerusalem church all prayed to God, and He answered by way of an angel each time.

There is no record of specific prayer by Paul on the ship (Acts 27:23-24) or Mary at the annunciation (Luke 1:26-27), but as anyone who prays knows, prayer is much more than uttered words. Sighs, groans and searchings of the soul are heard by God as prayer (Rom. 8:26), and angels can be sent in answer. Abraham's prayer dispatched an angel to Lot (Gen. 18:22-19:29). Hezekiah's prayers resulted in a destroying angel being sent into the midst of the Assyrian army (2 Kings 19:15-19, 35).

The prayers of me and my husband once moved God to send an angel to our son. It was at a time when the attack of the enemy had been fierce, and discouragement had seized our son, Tommy, and his wife, Jeannie, in Lafayette, La., where they pastored. Without telling them, my husband and I interceded in prayer for them and asked God to send them a ministering angel.

The next day Tommy called. There was a hush in his voice. "Mom," he quietly said, "something very special happened to Jeannie and me last night. God sent an angel to us."

Angels know the address for our prayers.

Prayer is our line of communication into the unseen world of God and angels, far beyond the bubble of our earthly existence. It is the believer's daily privilege to go boldly

into the throne room of God where angels dwell and, through our prayers, to seek help and make our petitions and requests known (Heb. 4:16).

When we enter into the throne room of heaven on the wings of prayer and speak the words, "Our Father," heaven pays attention because we are God's children. When we find ourselves in weakness or in need, a heartfelt cry of "Father!" will give us instant access to God and can send the angels scurrying, for they have been given orders to keep us in all our ways (Ps. 91:11). In the garden, with great distress of soul and perhaps a wail, Jesus uttered, "Father," and an angel from heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him (Luke 22:42-43).

Incidents of angelic leading, guidance, deliverance, provision and protection are numerous in the Scriptures. It would be surprising, I am sure, if all the events in the Bible were unfolded for us to see openly the corresponding activities of the spirit world. Could it be that whatever God does in the spirit world He does with the assistance of angels, just as whatever He does in our world He does with the assistance of men?

Two worlds—dramatically different, inexplicably intertwined. God rules in both. The connecting link is prayer, an expression from our limitations to the unlimited resources in God, which includes the ministry of an innumerable host of angels—ministers to the heirs of salvation.

Angels have been involved with God and His purposes since the dawn of creation.

Read a companion devotional.

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