

# The Reality Of Angels

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## The Reality of the Unseen World

Have you ever realized how little we actually see of so much that affects us in our experience and in our lives?

For there stood by me this night the 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 (Acts 27:23-24).

Are angels real? Do they affect us? What effect do they have? These are questions about the reality of angels that we want to consider. Since angels are obviously spiritual beings they belong in the invisible world. Then let us examine the reality of the unseen world. Human beings cannot see it because it is spiritual, while they are natural, physical; but the unseen world is very important to a believer.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (II Corinthians 4:17-18).

"The weight of glory" actually means a medal of achievement, "the medal of honor." So Paul is saying the "light affliction" that believers have here in this world just for a little while, works out for them an actual "medal of honor" before God.

For a believer, the unseen world is where God is, and where God rules. In considering the unseen world, the believer thinks about God, and about His promises. Actually we see only a very little of that which really affects us at any time. For example, as we think back about our origin: where did we come from and why? The origin and creation of all that is, is to be found in the unseen world. Then considering our destiny: the outcome of all that is; what is going to happen to us? Where are we going to be? All of this lies in the unseen world. Even while we are here in this world, the Providence that overrules and directs our paths by circumstances that we cannot control or arrange, is lodged in the unseen world. Because it is unseen, man naturally is ignorant of it. However, this is what the Bible talks about. Not everyone believes the Bible to be true, which is regrettable. But believers are encouraged to remember:

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (II Peter 1:21).

The Bible tells about angels, just as the Bible tells about God. How little we would know about God, if we did not have the Scriptures, and especially the record of Jesus of Nazareth; who could say, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father."

The Bible tells us about Heaven. The Bible tells us about spirits, all kinds of spirits, that are in Heaven; far more than we can ever come to know while we are here on earth. The Bible tells us about Satan, that mighty being who is bent on harming us, eventually killing us if he possibly could; and the Bible tells us about demons. They are Satan's agents, emissaries, who actually seek to lead us astray and to do us harm. No wise man ever discovered the things of which the Bible speaks. That which is in the

Bible is a revelation from God. These things are presented as a testimony, and they come to us from those who have learned the truth directly from God.

Faith is never a consensus of human ideas. A number of people may get together and figure out what would be good, and what we could believe; but that is never the basis of faith. The basic affirmation in faith is "I believe." "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." The witness of others is a strong help. It is when I talk with other Christians, and when I hear what they say, and when I learn what they have experienced, that my own confidence in the Scriptures grows. The revelation of God Himself; the revelation of Heaven; the revelation of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ; the revelation of the Holy Spirit; the revelation of Satan, is all clearly set forth in the Bible, and only in the Bible.

The Bible has been believed by millions unto their salvation. Results have followed, "by their fruits you shall know them." Folks who really go by the Bible have assurance; such believers also have comfort. By way of contrast, anybody who does not believe is sure to have a heart that is beset by fears no matter how he may try to cover them up. Deep, down underneath he is bound to have fears. He has nowhere to rest or nothing in which to trust. Where the unbelieving person has distress, the believing person gets guidance, in that he is being led of the Lord. It is those who believe in the Lord who are strengthened in all the experiences of living.

There is one truth set forth in the Bible that means a great deal to us: Almighty God is benevolent. God means to do us good. I know many people say they cannot trust God; this is because they do not know Him. He means to do us good. God means to bless us in His grace and mercy. He moves in the unseen world, behind the veil, to do us good. He sent His Son to redeem us; He sent His Spirit to bring us to Him and in our studies now we are going to see that He sends His angels to help His own.

## Angels Are Real

Are you able to believe that angels are actually real?

And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zechariah saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zechariah: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. And Zechariah said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season (Luke 1:11-20).

Here is the simple, plain record of the Bible. It is obvious there can be no doubt at all as to what the Bible has to say about the reality of angels. Gabriel was an angel; he was seen, he was talked to, he answered, and he gave Zechariah a pertinent message that was true. He told him something that was going to happen, and it did. All of this was in actual reality. Angels are associated with much that is recorded about godly persons in Scripture. In spite of the fact that you will find items about angels all through the Bible, people always feel what they read is beautiful, and yet so difficult to believe. It is a

common thing to use the word "angel" in our own vocabulary. We use it sometimes in referring to some benefit that we received. We say, "That person is an angel." Or we may in gratitude say, "You're an angel." Or when some advantage comes to a believer, we are inclined to say, "Well an angel brought it to me," without really believing it. We use it as a figure of speech.

All that is known to us about angels has been revealed in Scripture. If one does not believe the Bible, of course he can have no authentic concept of angels. But if you do believe the Bible as the Word of God, you will not question whether angels are real. What does the Bible actually reveal about angels? At the outset let us admit the Scriptures reveal far more than we Christians commonly recognize. Angels are invisible, it is true, because they belong in the spiritual world. But that is no discredit; God is invisible. The Holy Spirit is invisible. Satan is invisible. We are living right in the midst of a spiritual world in which God is God and the angels are His messengers.

Angels are persons. They have the capacity to think, to feel, so they can experience joy. They also have the capacity to will: they can obey. Angels are real, whether we see them or believe in them. Gabriel was actually there. The host of angels are actually throughout the spiritual universe.

Do you remember that instance in the Old Testament when Elisha was fleeing from the King of Syria (II Kings 6:15-17). He had with him on one occasion a young man, when the village was surrounded by Syrian soldiers. The next morning the young man spoke to Elisha and said, "Alas, my master, what shall we do? The army is all around us, there's no way out." Elisha replied in this fashion, "Lord, open his eyes that he may see." The young man's eyes were opened and he saw all around about chariots of fire. In other words, it is actually true all the time for believers and for godly people, the hosts of the Lord encamp round about those who believe in Him.

Angels can appear in visible form. Generally speaking, they are unseen, but occasionally they are seen, and usually in human form. In the book of Hebrews it is written: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2).

I often wonder what other instances have occurred than the one that is recorded about Abraham (Genesis 18-19). You remember the story how Abraham and Sarah were one day visited by three men. When they came Abraham greeted them courteously, brought them into his tent, and asked Sarah to prepare them a meal. As she went out to prepare a meal for them, they brought Abraham and Sarah a great message. They told Abraham, "Your wife, Sarah, will bear you a son." Sarah laughed when she heard it. When the angel took her to task for it, she denied she had laughed, but it was true. It happened just that way. In that instance Abraham and Sarah went ahead and prepared that meal for those three men without knowing that they were actually spiritual beings. This seems to show clearly there is no one standard appearance that would fit them all. They can appear and disappear at will. Even though they look like men and act like men, they can disappear.

Many popular conceptions of angels are fictional. It is common to think of angels as we have seen them on picture postcards. I do not want to destroy any beautiful picture you may have but I must tell you that as far as the Bible is concerned, there was never one time when any angel ever appeared in the world with wings. Not one time! There are creatures in Heaven that have wings, and they are called Seraphim and Cherubim. Such creatures may have wings. They may have more than one head and they may have more than two feet, and more than two hands; they may have multiple members in their bodies. They are strange beings, but they never were seen on earth. Holy men of God may have seen them in visions and have recorded them as they saw them. I am saying all this to keep it clear in our minds that you do not have to hear the rustle of their wings to think that angels are near.

An angel can actually appear like a human being entering into your life. But he could do a great many

things without appearing. Generally, angels are sent to deal with human beings. They probably do more for us than we can realize. The word "angel" in the Greek means messenger, and this is because they bring messages. For instance, as we have seen, three of them appeared as men to Abraham, and they brought him a message about the birth of Isaac. Two of them appeared to Lot in Sodom, and they told him to get out of there that the city was going to be destroyed; and it was. In mercy they took Lot by the hand and took him out telling him to escape for his life. These were messengers from God.

There was an angel of God that called Hagar when she was out in the desert, thinking that she was going to die. She was told, "Arise, lift up the lad, hold him in thine hand for I will make of him a great nation." The angel actually conveyed to her the Word of God. In their own way, in a high and holy way, they are messengers. They bring messages from God. They do not make up such messages, but they bring them to men. You will remember how Jacob was told by an angel who came to him: "Arise and get thee out from this land and return unto the land of thine kindred."

Even so far as Moses is concerned, it is written in the New Testament, "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast." That refers to the Old Testament. There is no record in the Bible of angels dealing with Moses, but here in the book of Hebrews it is referred to. The New Testament is replete with such incidents. An angel brought a message to Joseph on two occasions. Gabriel brought a message to Mary. Angels announced the birth of Jesus of Nazareth to shepherds. Angels announced His resurrection to His disciples. May the Lord help us, may Almighty God help us to be conscious of these facts and help us to rest in the idea that God has sent ministering spirits to help us along the way (Hebrews 1:14).

## **Men, Demons and Angels**

Do you realize that the Gospel teaches that man is not the only creature of God that is a person? There are also angels and demons.

But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels (Hebrews 12:22).

Then again we have these words:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12)

That is the way the Bible speaks of men, demons and angels. Do you believe in all these three? We have the Scriptural record before us. Demons are real; the Bible says so. Jesus of Nazareth dealt with them. Angels are real; the Bible says so.

Men are physical. They are made of the dust of the ground. They must participate in the physical to live: they must eat, drink and have shelter in the things of this world. Men are mortal. They can die and they must die; "it is appointed unto man once to die." This is probably the reason why so many people live all their lifetime subject to the fear of death. When they are born in this world, they are ignorant of the spiritual. They are not aware of that which is invisible. Men are inclined to serve self, and that is sinful. They were not created to be that way; but they became sinful. Our first parents sinned, and in them all men were involved, so that men are inclined to be sinfully interested in themselves.

Men actually have two natures. They have a physical nature which Paul calls the flesh; and they have

a spiritual nature which Paul calls the spirit. These different natures are contrary one to the other. Man is too weak in himself to resist temptation; he yields to the temptation to serve the flesh and to ignore the spirit. Thus man is a sinner. He is a sinner in his disposition, what he wants to do; he is a sinner in his action, what he actually does; and he is a sinner in his rating before God; he is condemned.

All of this may be well known to those who know the Gospel. Believers must wrestle with demons; and demons are spiritual. They are not visible; we cannot see them. They are not limited to bodies. A demon is a being who is not limited by time or space. Demons do not die. There is no end to their being until God finally destroys them. That has not come to pass. Demons are aware of God. As a matter of fact when our Lord Jesus Christ was here demons knew Him before people knew Him. Demons are aware of God and they are aware of His power; but they hate Him. They are against Him. Demons apparently were originally in Heaven with all the privileges that a creature would have being in the presence of God. They fell from their high state, and they are sometimes spoken of as "fallen angels." We understand from Scripture that they fell because of their pride.

Demons serve as the agents of Satan. Satan rules over them by fear, and this means that in their activity, demons are malicious. They mean to do believers harm. They aim to destroy the work of God. Demons know the Son of God, and they know that He will eventually destroy them. He is going to cast them out of where they are and destroy them. They fear Him. They cannot face Him. Our safety from the activity of demons is in Christ. This, among other things, is one of the happiest things for the Christian to have in mind when he is thinking about demons.

Angels are spiritual in the same context as demons, and they are creatures of God. They are made of spirit, though we do not know what that is. They cannot be sensed. You cannot see, hear or touch them. If the Scriptures say that angels bring messages, they reveal the truth. Angels do bring messages. But in themselves they are invisible. Angels do not die, according to the Scripture. Angels are neither male nor female. There is no marriage in Heaven. They are persons, but not entirely like human beings. Angels are aware of God, they know God. They worship Him; they serve Him; they obey Him. We understand that when they are in Heaven, they behold the face of God. That seems to be their major occupation so far as we know.

Angels have power. We speak of the mighty angels. They are obedient to God; they hasten to do His will. Angels do not act according to their own will. Any time they came to men, they were sent. Anything they ever did, they were told. The only thing that they do in action so far as we know is to obey God: "Whom they obey with joy."

The word "angel" means messenger and this points immediately to their function. They are active in communicating God's Word to men. There are two groups of these mighty beings: holy angels who worship before God and serve God, and fallen angels who fear and serve Satan. Everything we know about the angels involves the children of men. That is the only way we ever find out about them. The Bible tells about what they did to someone here on earth. They are always messengers doing the will of God; just as the evil angels, the fallen angels, do the will of Satan. The leader of the holy angels, the One who overrules them and directs them, is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The leader of the fallen angels is Satan. The holy angels, when they communicate, convey the truth. The fallen angels, demons, convey lies. Satan is a liar and the father of it.

I have no idea why angels and demons are needed in the spiritual world. My human mind always runs forward in that interest, and asks "why did God need them?" I don't know. Why He made them, I don't know. Apparently, the whole situation of conflict between angels and demons is grounded in the opposition that there is between God and Satan. It is a sobering thought that this great massive war in

the spiritual world is being waged over our human hearts. Actually, we are the prize involved, and we are challenged to follow either one or the other.

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24).

How careful we should be! We may feel as helpless as babes in the woods as we think about demons, but we are not without some guidance. If we deny ourselves and seek to please God, we may be sure we are being led by the Holy Spirit of God and being ministered to by the angels of God. If we ignore God and we seek to please ourselves, our own ego, we may be sure we are playing right into the hands of the devil himself. May God help us humbly to talk with Him and to depend upon His grace and mercy. God has sent a host, an innumerable company of angels to minister to the heirs of salvation.

## **Work of Angels**

Have you any idea about what angels do?

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

Let us keep in mind that all we know about angels is found in the Bible. In reading Scripture we learn a number of things. Angels are creatures of God. It is revealed in the Scripture that God created angels, as He created Satan, He created demons, He created Cherubim, He created Seraphim. They all have power to do. They have the power to serve. They have greater power than man has because they have the power which God gives to them. Angels are immortal. By that I mean they do not die; they cannot die. Of all these creatures that God has made, the one that can die is man. "It is appointed unto man once to die."

Angels are neither male nor female, such as man is.

For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven (Matthew 22:30).

Angels are servants of God. In this way we can distinguish demons. Demons are also spiritual beings, but demons serve Satan, whereas angels serve God. They look into His face and are quick to do His bidding. They do just what God would have them to do. They are sent on missions and they do things for people as God gives them instruction. Angels are messengers from God. They are only reported in Scripture when they have been sent on some mission. The only times they are mentioned in Scripture is when they are sent forth to do His will.

Angels are persons, i.e., they can think and feel and can decide to do things. In the book of Luke it is written that there is joy in the presence of God over one sinner that repenteth (Luke 15:10). Thus they can have joy. They can take assignments. They desire to look into the things of Jesus Christ. When Peter wrote about the things which happened to the Lord Jesus Christ, which included His death and resurrection, he wrote "which things the angels desire to look into." I am impressed in my own mind to think that they are intrigued by it. There is something about the death of Christ that all Heaven wonders about. How is it that God would go through death for man, the sinner?

Angels are the ministers for the heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14). If we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are to inherit salvation. Salvation in its fullest sense is to be given to us. It is written that angels are ministers for the heirs of salvation. The Scriptures record how time and again when some child of God, some godly believer, reached some extremity of some sort, an angel would appear that would bring to him what he needed for relief. This seems to have been the way in which things would happen. The presence of angels seems to have been understood by spiritual men. Spiritual men and spiritual women have trembled in the sight of angels. There is, something about angels that is awe inspiring. When any one has been conscious of the fact that a message was conveyed by an angel, there has been a sense of being in the very presence of God. Yet such presence seems to have been understood. There was no sense of shock or sense of disbelief so far as the godly people were concerned. They were ready to believe in the reality of angels.

Angels may be assigned to each child of God to protect him. There is a well known expression, "guardian angel," which is based on this idea. It seems to rest upon the Scripture passage, Matthew 18:10, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." This would seem to imply that there are individual angels assigned to individual persons. The angels in the presence of God, beholding the face of God, await directions that He would give on behalf of a particular child of God. I have not settled in my own mind whether this would refer only to believers. It is possible that this very passage that we have mentioned actually does apply especially to believers. It is just possible that God has a special way of providing for those who actually do believe in Him.

Angels seem also to be assigned to each congregation of believers. In the book of Revelation 1:20 we read about "the seven stars," which were held in the hand of Christ in that vision: "the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." Then beginning in chapter 2 at verse 1 and going through chapter 3, messages are given to each of the seven churches respectively. Each time the message was given to "the angel of the church of Ephesus," "the angel of the church of Pergamos," "the angel of the church of Thyatira," etc., and this would seem to imply that there is a messenger that is given the authority and the commission to communicate a message in the name of the Lord, for these people who believe. And so it would seem the function of these angels was to communicate the message of God to the people of God as they were grouped in these congregations.

Angels can appear unto man. While there are numerous examples, there is no standard appearance. Once again let me point out humbly there is nothing said here about wings. There is no indication in Scripture that any being with wings ever appeared to man on this earth except in a vision. The angels who did appear were seen usually as men. So with Abraham and Sarah while they were in the desert, three men appeared, who turned out to be angels of God. Sarah prepared a meal for them. When Lot was in Sodom, the two angels who went down there to bring him out looked like men. They took him by the hand and led him out. When the disciples on the Day of Ascension stood looking up into the heavens, two men standing by in white apparel said to them:

Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. (Acts 1:11).

At the time of the resurrection the appearances of the angels were more than human.

And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment

white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men" (Matthew 28:2-4).

That would certainly indicate something else than merely human appearance.

This was also the case in the recorded visions:

And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: and he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices (Revelation 10:1-3).

This is the description of what John saw in the vision. Though it was a vision, it yet seems to imply that there was something about their appearance that was more than human. We read in Daniel:

Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: his body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in color to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude (Daniel 10:5-6).

This again was a vision, but it seems obvious that in what Daniel saw, something more human is implied.

In thinking about angels, it will help to keep in mind that they are different from the Cherubim, different from the Seraphim. We should keep in mind also that the Scriptures never present them to us as someone we should lean upon. There is one Mediator between God and man: the Man Christ Jesus. Whatever else may be true about angels, we should remember they are being directed by the Lord. They are the Lord's servants on our behalf. We are the fortunate ones who are blessed by the work of God through the Lord Jesus Christ for us, which may be brought to us through some ministry of angels.

## **Relation to Jesus of Nazareth**

Have you ever realized how much angels are reported to have done in relation to Jesus of Nazareth?

We remind ourselves the only data about Jesus Christ available to us, is in the Bible. We should beware therefore that we do not let ourselves be tempted to omit any part of that which is in the record. Except a person shall receive and accept in his mind the whole record as it is written in Scripture, any conception that he might have of Jesus of Nazareth, or of Christ Jesus, will be true only as he keeps the whole record in mind.

To know the truth revealed about the Lord Jesus Christ, one must note also what is written about what the angels did to Him and for Him. The record of the life of Jesus Christ includes much about angels. Before His birth (Luke 1:11-20), Gabriel came to tell Zechariah of the birth of his son, John the Baptist. When Zechariah the priest could not believe that his wife Elisabeth would give birth to a child, he was stricken dumb. Then in Luke 1:20-28 there is quite a full description of the incident when Gabriel, the archangel, was sent from God to a virgin called Mary, and told her that she was going to give birth to a child before she was married. He ended his whole explanation to her with these words: "For with God nothing shall be impossible."

And again in Matthew 1:20 speaking about Joseph, it is written:



But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 1:20).

The record tells us that the angel told him that she would give birth to a child who would be called Jesus, "for He shall save His people from their sins." Later we read that the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying, "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt" (Matthew 2:13). Then when he was in Egypt we read,

But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life (Matthew 2:19-20).

We are all acquainted with the Christmas story of what happened at the time He was born.

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people (Luke 2:9-10).

After He was born, we do not know all about how angels may have ministered to Jesus of Nazareth during His earthly career because there is little mention of it. But there is the incident of His temptation in the desert: "Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him" (Matthew 4:11). This would seem to indicate that the Heavenly Father was watching over His beloved Son in this serious event in His life, when He was being tempted by Satan. With Jesus of Nazareth in an exhausted condition, His Heavenly Father sent the angels to minister unto Him.

When Jesus of Nazareth exposed Himself before the people of the Jews in word and in deed, demons recognized Him. They feared Him; they obeyed Him.

And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time (Matthew 8:29)?

And you will remember that when they said unto Him, "If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine," and He said, "Go," they went.

Angels were involved in another great crisis in His life in Gethsemane, when He was praying unto His Father, so earnestly that He sweat as if it were "great drops of blood." "And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him" (Luke 22:43). There is no record that Jesus of Nazareth had asked for help. Never in the course of the whole record about Him in the four Gospels is there any indication that He ever asked for angels to come and help Him. We know that He put His trust in God. He rested Himself in His Father. It was His heavenly Father who sent the angels, fulfilling a statement in the Old Testament.

For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone (Psalms 91:11-12).

Jesus of Nazareth knew that help from angels was available to Him. But there is no record that He ever asked such help. He committed Himself to God. This can be important to us because no matter how

many of them there are, no matter how powerful they may be, no matter how gentle and kind and benign their attitude toward us may be, our interest should be focused primarily on the Lord. When Peter was going to defend Jesus of Nazareth at the time of His arrest the Lord said to Peter:

Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53)?

He knew He could have had their help in His extremity.

When our Lord Jesus was teaching in this world, and was telling certain things about the end of the world, He taught that angels would be active at the time of His return. When explaining the meaning of the payable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:36-42) He said, "The reapers are the angels." Later He said again:

The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:41-42).

An important thing to remember is that when you are thinking about angels, and thinking about all the kind and lovely and gentle things that they are capable of doing, you should always keep in mind that they are the servants of God; and there is an aspect of the truth that means actually terror for the evil ones, and angels will one day do His will about that. Just as in the parable of the net, we read that when they threw it out in the sea and took in all manner of fish both good and bad, which then had to be separated, the Lord interpreted that to His disciples to mean, "the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just" (Matthew 13:49-50).

When Jesus of Nazareth was telling about what was going to happen in the future, He said, "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:31). This indicates that angels are active not only in Heaven, but they will be active here on earth. Then again it is written "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him" (Matthew 25:31). We should not fail to remember the record of what happened at the time of His resurrection.

And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow (Matthew 28:2-3).

And entering into the sepulcher, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted (Mark 16:5)

Luke records about the resurrection: "Two men stood by them in shining garments" (Luke 24:4). John reports what happened when Mary looked into the sepulchre: "and seeth two angels in white sitting" (John 20:12). At the time of His ascension from this world into the Heavens above, while the disciples looked steadfastly up into Heaven, two men stood by them in white apparel (Acts 1:10). Paul writes to other believers:

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels (II Thessalonians 1:7).

This quick review of Scripture shows that in the whole life, ministry, work and significance of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God, angels were very powerful.

## **Abraham and the Angels**

Did you know that God is personally concerned about what happens to a Christian in his daily affairs?

We look to the Bible for authentic information about angels. What people may say will always be inadequate, but we do trust what the Bible reveals about them.

In Genesis chapters 18 and 19 the record shows how Abraham and Lot were blessed by the ministry of angels.

And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; and he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground (Genesis 18:1-2).

Apparently Abraham and Sarah did not know at that time anything other than that their visitors were three men. Abraham requested Sarah to prepare them a meal. This she did and they ate. So whatever else we may need to understand about these persons, a meal was prepared for them and they ate. The whole account seems to imply they appeared as human beings:

And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent. And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh (Genesis 18:9-15).

As we look at these persons, we can see one of them had the power, the authority, to make a prediction that Sarah would have a son. His prediction was incredible to Sarah, so much so that she laughed when she heard it. Then we read these words: "And the Lord said unto Abraham." This raises the question in one's mind, "Was one of these three the Lord?" Many persons reading and studying Scripture believe that from time to time in Old Testament times, before the Incarnation when the Son of God lived here on earth in human form, there were times when the Lord actually appeared in the form of man. In this case where it is written "And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh?" it seems that one of the three was the Lord Himself.

This form of expression occurs several times in verses 16 to 22:

And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do (Genesis 18:16-17).

And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which

is come unto me; and if not, I will know. And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord (Genesis 18:20-22).

Later we read that when they did get to Sodom, there were two that went in to Lot. This would leave the third one here with Abraham, and here He is referred to as the Lord. The record of this wonderful intercessory prayer found in verses 23-33 implies that one of the three, referred to as the Lord, had the prerogative to answer prayer, because He could talk to Abraham and deal with him. No one knows for sure that this was actually the Lord, as the Scriptures do not make it clear. The allusion is here. It may be that this person spoke the mind of the Lord, the mind of the Son of God, and was so referred to. If this had been truly the Lord Himself, which is quite possible and I myself am inclined toward believing this is so; then the language would be fitting.

The record goes on to report how the angels dealt with Lot:

And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; and he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night. And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat (Genesis 19:1-3)

Remember that in their dealing with Abraham and Sarah there were three persons. The third one apparently continued communing with Abraham while the other two went on to Sodom. This fits the situation and the record. Thus it would seem that when in human form, with our limitations of time and space, with one person at one time in one place; these angels were limited just as we are. That is different from God. God is everywhere, always, infinite and eternal.

Lot urged his hospitality upon them, and they allowed themselves to be persuaded to be his house guests. The angels act as if they had authority. When the men of Sodom came and wanted to violate these visitors, and Lot had tried to intervene and was unsuccessful, these beings "smote the men that were at the door with blindness both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door." That is not human; that is super-human. They seem to have the power of God, and yet in that record there seems to be a certain restraint. Why didn't they strike those men dead instead of striking them blind? I do not know, but it does bring to my mind something about the mercy and the grace of God, where He is not willing that any should perish but wishing that all should come unto everlasting life.

These two men told Lot: "We will destroy this place." They talked as if they could do it. But later they worded it this way, "For the Lord will destroy this city" (Genesis 19:14). Lot urged his sons-in-law to come out of Sodom, he said, "The Lord will destroy." If the angels were acting as the personal agents of God, all of this would fit. When they were coming out, while Lot lingered, these men laid hold upon his hand. When these men took Lot by the hand, with his wife and family, it was almost as though they compelled them to come out. "The Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city" (Genesis 19:16). The reference in the record is first to the men and then to the Lord, almost interchangeably. Apparently, these angels had power and authority as from God.

In all this we can see angels are sent from God to help those who trust in Him. Even now, I feel like asking the Lord to forgive me that I have failed to appreciate the fact that He in His infinite care and with all of His resources is constantly watching over me. That is absolutely true: "Thou God seest me." Angels were unknown and unrecognized by those they came to help. Abraham failed to recognize them. Lot did not recognize them. They were more powerful than men. They said what they would do which

was more than any man could do. But they did not break up the natural process. They had those men stricken blind but they did not cause any permanent injury to come to them. They brought messages about the immediate situation: "Now is the time; right now you must leave this city." When Lot was not ready to leave, and lingered behind, they took him by the hand and led him out. This is the thoughtful, gracious, kind, interest and attention that God through His messengers shows towards us. They have freedom to yield to urgent pleas. When Lot urged them to stay, they did. Angels act only in the will of God, not on their own.

How wonderful it is that these mighty beings are sent from God from Heaven into this world on behalf of those who put their trust in God. When you and I believe in God, we have entered in on the wonderful privilege of being ministered to by "the angels of God."

## **Jacob**

Can you believe that God has a personal interest in what happens to you?

To believe in the reality of angels, it is necessary to believe in the reality of the spiritual world. One must believe that God IS and that God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. This will enable us to believe not only that spiritual realities exist, but that they affect each of us. Believing that God is, is important, but believing that God cares about me, knows about me, is very important. My interest in angels is important, but it is my belief in God that makes this meaningful. It is important to believe not only that angels exist in countless numbers, "innumerable hosts," but that they can affect us here.

Angels do not act independently. They are not free to do as they please. Each one of the holy angels is related to God as a servant to do His will, to act as His agent. We have an illustration of this in the book of Genesis in the story that concerns Hagar. You will remember that Hagar was an Egyptian woman, a servant. She was Sarah's maid and under certain circumstances, Sarah gave her to be Abraham's second wife.

An incident in Hagar's life is recorded:

And the angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur. And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai. And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands. And the angel of the Lord said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude. And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction. And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren. And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me (Genesis 16:7-13)?

In this account it is recorded that God dealt with Hagar through an angel. The angel made the contact with Hagar and dealt with her as if he had authority. He told her what to do, and he promised what would happen to her. In his communication he put it in the first person, saying: "I will do this; I will do that."

There are Bible students who think that this is another instance in the Old Testament where the Son of God, Jesus Christ Himself, came into this world before the incarnation, appeared in human form and

executed this work. But whether this is so or not, the record does tell about an angel coming from God, who directed her course of action and promised her blessing which came to pass. She obeyed what the angel told her; and later she gave birth to Ishmael.

Fifteen years later she was expelled from her home with her child. While wandering in the desert and about to die of thirst, she had another such experience.

And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation (Genesis 21:17-18).

Here the record shows God, through an angel, dealing with Hagar again. The angel acts as if he had authority, directing her as to what she ought to do and promising her what God is going to do. She was spared, and God did bless Ishmael to become great. The angel of God spake with authority, because he came from God; and he promised blessing, because he was speaking for God. It is helpful for us to remember that back in those days a woman such as Hagar had no Scripture to go by. There was no Bible to read and there was no indwelling Holy Spirit that would guide her from within. So we can recognize that there were circumstances in the situations which required direct contact in order that communication might come from God.

The story of Jacob records that he was the younger, the second born, of twins. He believed in God, and he wanted the blessing of God. In his early life he schemed to get that blessing by his own efforts. Many people who read his story simply do not like him because of his selfish scheming, and yet the record shows how God dealt with him in grace.

And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it (Genesis 28:12).

Thus Jacob saw in his vision a "stairway" leading from earth to Heaven, with the angels of God going up and coming down on that stairway. Thus the reality of Heaven and the reality of earth were put together in one picture.

This vision of Jacob at Bethel revealed the grace of God who intended to bless Jacob. This was before Jacob had done anything to earn it or qualify for it. Later, the angel of God spake unto Jacob himself saying, "Jacob, arise, get thee out and return to thine own land." Jacob was thus encouraged and reassured by the appearance of the angel.

When Jacob was leaving Laban and going back to his own country, the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's host." Thus by the angels' appearance, Jacob was encouraged even though he was later to meet Esau on the way. As Jacob prepared to meet Esau, he was filled with fear and doubt. Esau had said he would kill him, and Jacob dreaded this encounter that he was about to have with Esau. Jacob spent all night in praying for help. Here is the famous encounter, with an angel in the form of a man. The situation was desperate. Jacob was afraid that Esau intended to kill him, and he wanted the blessing of God. In fact, it could seem that Esau coming now, even killing him, and certainly stripping Jacob of everything he had, would be a form of justice. This was Jacob's past coming up now to face him, and he felt helpless to face that. Jacob wrestled all night with the angel and would not let go. The angel finally blessed him. This was due entirely to the grace of God. God did something for Jacob that he did not deserve. He did it for Jacob, because Jacob persisted in believing in Him and depending upon Him. The diligent, urgent character of the praying seemed to make a difference. With such a

complete sketch of what did happen before us, we can study this for our own understanding. Here we see Jacob's faith in God. Jacob knew of his own sinfulness, and knew he was unworthy. Yet, he had an unshakeable confidence in the will of God to bless him.

This assurance on the part of Jacob would be based upon his original vision. God had told him He would bless him, and had given him this floor to stand on. Jacob believed in the reality of Heaven; he believed in the reality of God; so angels came and ministered to him according to the promise he had received from God. Also in this account can be seen Jacob's understanding of himself. He knew he could not face the perilous prospect of meeting Esau. He made elaborate plans; careful, clever procedures, but he had no confidence in them. He needed the help of God. In Jacob's praying, he asked for the blessing of God. He did not have anything to bring; yet he asked God to bless him.

The resistance of the angel is a strange thing for us to think about. So many people have an idea that if you come into the presence of God and ask: you do not have to push, you do not have to pull, you just get it. This is not the way it was with Jacob. Jacob had to wrestle and the resistance of the angel put his urgency to the test. The angel resisted him and he resisted the angel, until finally he broke Jacob's thigh. Thus in the course of his praying, Jacob's flesh was crippled. His helplessness with this broken thigh made him powerless, yet in his faith he clung to the promise of blessing. This did not issue in an immediate triumph, an open victory in the wrestling, but it did demonstrate Jacob's persevering faith. In other words, Jacob did not overcome the angel, but persevered until the angel blessed him. In this blessing he was permanently affected. He was eternally blessed.

In our day and time we have the Holy Spirit. We have the Scriptures; but it is the same God. We should not be surprised if individual people have special visitations from God, special help from God that we cannot explain. God has His own way of communicating His own thoughts into the hearts of those who believe Him.

## **Gideon**

Do you think God could communicate His will to anyone today?

There are many aspects about angels that are hard for us to understand, since some of them have not even been revealed. Angels are invisible and they belong in the spiritual world. There is no direct revelation in the Bible of any one angel in himself. It is their actions that are clearly recorded; and yet only their actions so far as man is concerned. The appearance of angels is recorded. It would generally appear that they looked like men. We remember the young man seated in the empty tomb; and the two men that were there in the tomb speaking to the disciples; and the two men that were there at the time of the ascension speaking to the disciples. We saw how Abraham had three men come talking to him and he prepared a meal for them. It turned out that they were angels. In general apparently their appearance is like that of man, but at no time is the suggestion made that they actually are men.

We remember there are both fallen angels and holy angels. The fallen angels are under the guidance and the direction of Satan himself, and the holy angels are the servants of God. Generally when we speak of angels we are referring to the holy angels. As such we speak of them as being the ministers of God, which is to say, the servants of God. There seems to be no doubt that their obedience was constant. Whenever they are mentioned, they are always found fully and totally obedient to Almighty God. Apparently, they do as they are told, and they say only what they are told to say.

We can understand something more of angels as we look to the story of Gideon, who became one of the great judges. The part that is played by the angel is almost forgotten because the actual story of Gideon's exploits is so fascinating, so amazing that it seems to crowd out everything else. This account is recorded in Judges 6:11. At the time this incident occurred, Gideon was a young man still working on his father's farm. He believed in God. Gideon had heard of the miracles which God had done, the works of wonder that God had performed. Gideon was depressed because of the conditions that were prevailing in his country, the people were in bondage to the Midianites. As a matter of fact, Gideon was engaged in what we would call "underground activity." The record is that Gideon was threshing grain. He was threshing grain in an out of the way place, in a hidden place, to keep out of sight from the Midianites because the Midianites levied a large tax on any grain that harvested. If the grain had been threshed out in the open, the Midianites would have taken the most of it. So Gideon in hiding was threshing his father's grain that they might have it for themselves. At this time the young man in this depressed condition had no hope of any prospect for the better. Everything seemed to be against the people.

An angel came to Gideon who looked like a man.

And there came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor (Judges 6:11-12).

Gideon's response was very natural. He addressed the stranger as "Lord," which may have implied that Gideon felt he was one who had authority over him. Whatever the angel's appearance was, whatever the whole thing actually meant, Gideon felt he was being talked to by someone who was stronger than he was, someone greater who had control over him.

And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites (Judges 6:13).

This is the predicament in which Gideon found himself.

And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee (Judges 6:14)?

The angel did not argue with Gideon. He gave him no answer to his perplexity. Gideon asks, "How in the world does it happen that we are as we are?" And the angel said, "Go . . . and thou shalt save Israel . . . have not I sent thee?" No discussion.

This is how it could be with us. If some thought comes to our minds as to what God would want us to do, our first thought is, "How can this be true? Why am I in this situation? If God is for me, why am I having all this trouble?" There will be no discussion. You will not have your questions answered. In this case Gideon was told, "You go. You can go because I sent you." But notice again how Gideon responded. Gideon was very normal about this.

And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house (Judges 6:15).

You can feel in those words the natural doubts that Gideon has. Gideon is thinking about himself. "I



am supposed to do that? I am not strong. You say I am going to be able to do that? I am the least in my father's house." Now actually what Gideon said was true. But notice how the angel speaks to him again.

"And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man" (Judges 6:16).

There is the answer! This is no argument about Gideon's strength. Gideon says he is not able, and he is right. But the promise of the Lord commits the power of God to this operation. Gideon asked for a sign that would assure him that God would help, and then he went away to get some food to set before this messenger. The angel apparently looked like a man all the time. When Gideon came back and set the food before him, the angel told him to pour out the liquid part of it, and to set the rest of it before him. This he did. The angel then touched it with his staff and immediately it was consumed in flames. So Gideon knew he had been dealing with God.

Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face. And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die (Judges 6:22-23).

Then Gideon built an altar there at which to worship God. This seems to be the end of the function of the angel. There are further accounts of Gideon's exploits, but there is no more mention of angels.

Considering this whole matter, what shall you and I make of this? I am going to suggest to you that one thing that we can make out of this would be that God could send us a message of some sort, urging upon us something that we should do, when we personally feel we are too weak and unable. God is able and if God said so, it can be done; for nothing is impossible with God.

## **Elijah**

Did you know that the Bible teaches that God not only watches over the daily life of a believer, but also that He can and will take part in it?

The whole Gospel is developed within the context of two worlds. There is the natural world and the spiritual world. They are both real. Each one of them exists right now. What we mean by the natural is everything there is in nature that you can hear, see, smell, taste and touch. But there is another world that is the spiritual, which you cannot sense at all. The life history of any person told about in the Bible, who had dealings with God, involves both these worlds.

Both worlds are just as real for an unbeliever, but his mind ignores the spiritual. He is all committed to and filled up with the natural. The natural, unbelieving person, simply cannot succeed in living because he is only looking at half the picture of reality as it is in the universe.

The Bible reports how Jacob saw this in his vision. In that vision at Bethel, Jacob saw the "ladder" between earth and Heaven. Earth was real; Heaven was real; and there was a connection, a structured connection between the two. The angels of God were ascending and descending upon the "ladder", revealing an active interaction between the two worlds.

We have noted that the mind of a natural mind is constituted by an awareness of what he senses, what he hears, sees, smells, tastes and touches. Even so far as a child is concerned, he begins to be conscious of hunger, he needs air to breathe, he needs food to eat, he wants to be comfortable. Spiritual reality is not

in the mind of a child since it is invisible and intangible. Spiritual things are just out of reach so far as natural man is concerned. A person can grow up naturally without an interest or awareness in the spiritual world. Jacob at Bethel recognized the reality of the spiritual world when he saw Heaven and earth, but he also saw the relationship between the two. Heaven enshrouds the earth, just as a blanket surrounds a child. Heaven not only enshrouds the earth but it affects the earth.

With the reality of angels in mind let us turn our attention to one of the greatest prophets of all time, Elijah the Tishbite. He was a servant of God, sent to help Israel. The record of his life is marked by revelation from God. Elijah's own personal experience was profoundly affected by the invisible world. He had dealings with the invisible God. This came out in what he taught and also in what happened to him. He was a living, walking example of someone affected by the reality of the invisible world.

At the height of his long struggle with the king, Ahab, Elijah announced that there was to be no rain until he said so. This so enraged the king that the king was going to put him to death. Elijah fled, becoming a fugitive from the presence of the king. At this point in his career there occurred a series of remarkable incidents. When he was hiding in the mountains far from anyone, the ravens fed him. As he came down from the mountains, and he saw a certain woman who was out gathering some sticks to prepare food for her child and herself, Elijah asked her to make him a little cake first. She said she had enough only for one meal and she was out gathering sticks to bake that meal into bread. She intended that she and her son were going to eat it, and then they were going to die of starvation. Elijah said to her that if she would make him a little cake first, she would find that the meal in that barrel would never fail, and the oil in that jug would never run dry. She obeyed and it was that way. Later, the widow's son died. Elijah asked her to let him go in by the boy, and he raised him from the dead. All these events were amazing, remarkable things, possible only because Elijah had a personal relationship with the living God. It was as though Elijah could reach in beyond the veil, into the invisible, and draw strength from Almighty God. When Elijah confronted the King of Ahab with the fact that he now would make it rain, he showed that he really was a prophet from God. He asked Ahab to bring all Israel together. Standing alone against the prophets of Baal, Elijah challenged the people to note which could bring fire from Heaven to consume the sacrifice on the altar. The prophets of Baal danced around their offering all day long until evening, and nothing happened. When the evening hour drew near, it was Elijah's turn. He prayed to Almighty God to reveal His power and demonstrate that Elijah really was His servant by sending down fire and consuming the altar. This is exactly what happened. Afterward Elijah went to the top of the mountain and prayed that it should rain and this also happened. These are all incidents in which Elijah demonstrated to the people that the things of Heaven were real; the things of God were real; and that he personally knew God and was representing Him.

These great exploits on the part of Elijah could have tempted Elijah to pride. The Bible does not say that it did. The Bible does say of Elijah that he was a man of like passions as we are. He was as human as we are. It could be very easy for Elijah to think that he really was somebody great. Not in any narrow or shallow way, but in a real profound manner, greatness was attached to this man. Then God allowed him to be beset by a vengeful woman, Jezebel, who was going to come and kill him. Elijah had to flee for his life. He ran off into the hills. Tired, worn and exhausted, Elijah is found under the juniper tree. He requested that he might die. A strange request, when you stop to think that all he had to do was stand still and Jezebel would have killed him. But Elijah did not want Jezebel to have that satisfaction.

Elijah was willing to leave this world, but he wanted God to take him. He says to God, "Take my life." An angel came and touched him. "Arise and eat." He looked, and he saw a cake ready for food, and a cruse of water ready for his drink. After he had eaten, he lay down and slept again. Then we read the

angel of the Lord came a second time. "Arise and eat." Again Elijah arose and ate. He went in the strength of that food for forty days. It seems a very simple account, yet it is very profound. The angel was obviously a helper to keep him alive.

Would you think Elijah lacked faith? This experience was not so much a lack of faith, as a lack of strength. Elijah was tired, worn out, exhausted. The servant of God was a man of like passions as we are, and that means he could be exhausted. All the suggestions that Elijah lacked faith are based on a wrong idea. They are based on the idea that Elijah was going to do it himself, and that now he thought he was unable, and so he quit. But this is not true. Elijah never did depend on himself. Actually he had no further commission to perform. A person can have faith only when God gives it to him. If God does not give faith a person cannot pump it up. Faith is not something a servant can produce. Faith is not will power. It is based upon what God's Word promises. You are saved by grace. You are saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God. Elijah was in an extremity because of his weakness, so God sent His angels to minister to Elijah to strengthen him, and then gave him no further task to perform. May the Lord bless us to look up to Him and expect help from Him in the time of trouble.

## **Peter**

If a person told you of an unusual experience in which there seemed to be an angel, would you say this was only his imagination?

But the 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 (Acts 5:19-20).

Do you realize that in all the works of Jesus of Nazareth as reported in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, while He was here on earth in His fleshly body, such a thing never happened? Nothing like this is reported as taking place during His earthly life before His death and resurrection.

We have noticed how angels dealt with Abraham, and how an angel wrestled all night with Jacob. We have seen that an angel called Gideon to his task, and an angel came and nourished Elijah when he was exhausted. These men lived before the Scriptures were written and before the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. So it would be natural for us to note what happened during the time of Christ when He was here. Angels came at the time of His birth, and they were there at His death. The Scripture promises they will be with Him in countless numbers at His coming again. But during the time He was here on earth there seems to be little mention of the appearance or the activity of angels. However after His death, and after Pentecost, as seen in the book of Acts, there were occasions when angels appeared.

There are two sensational incidents of this sort in which Peter was involved. Peter had been personally called by Jesus of Nazareth to be His follower. He had forsaken his own business to follow Jesus. He had been with Jesus of Nazareth personally for three years, and had seen the power of God. He had seen the empty grave with the body gone. He had seen the angel sitting beside the open grave telling them that the body of Jesus was gone, and Peter heard the message. He had been in the upper room when the Lord came and appeared. This Peter is the same Peter who stood on the Mount of Transfiguration and saw the Lord in all His glory. Peter was there with the disciples on the Day of Ascension when he saw the Person of Jesus Christ taken out of this world up into the clouds and away. Peter had been at Pentecost, and after Pentecost preached that great sermon when some three thousand

people were converted. Peter had been at the Beautiful Gate when he and John were entering and the lame man called to them. He through the power of God had been involved in the healing of this lame man. Peter had seen what had happened to Ananias and Sapphira when they lied to God. So Peter was a man who had experiences that would have prepared him to expect great things from God, and to accept them when they came. This is the man involved in the incident we are about to study.

But the 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" (Acts 5:19-21).

The account goes on to say:

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 without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people" (Acts 5:21-25).

This could not possibly be an illusion. Those disciples who had been put into prison were not only out on the street; they were actually in the temple preaching. This story just as it stands demands either you accept it or you reject it. There is no record that Peter asked for any help while he was in prison. And there is no description of the angel. The only One ever to be praised is the Lord Jesus Christ. The only glory that is ever to be given is to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the angels are here as His servants. Apparently Peter and John carried on in witnessing as if all were normal.

A similar experience later again involved Peter.

Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of 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, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up 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 wist 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 ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord (Acts 12:5-10).

We must take this story as it is. It either stands as it is or there is no point in considering it. Peter himself had doubts about the reality of what he was experiencing until:

They went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith 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, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews (Acts 12:10-11).

So if I have trouble believing it, it helps to note that is exactly how Peter felt. He had put his shoes on and had walked, feeling it was just a vivid dream. But when he reached that iron gate and it swung out of its own accord, and then he walked out in the city a whole block, he woke up and said, "I declare this is real. This actually happened." Astonishing yes, but actually real. Peter went on to the house where the

church was praying. Peter had not asked for this deliverance, and could not believe it at first even when it happened.

So let us ask again, are angels real? The Bible says so! Can they appear to men? The Bible says so. Do they know about our situation? The Bible says so. Can they do anything? The Bible says so. Then what shall we do? Ask for the angels? No. Look up to God and ask for God. All praise and glory to the name of Christ Jesus our Lord. God will send messengers in His will to aid us and to guide us. All for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.