

IT IS GOD'S CHOICE: ANGELS AMONG US UNAWARE Hebrews 1:5-14; Psalm 91

There are numerous stories of some mysterious stranger who brings help in a time of need and then is never seen again. Are these merely coincidences (WHICH I PERSONALLY DO NOT BELIEVE IN), or could it be that angels really do walk among us ready to come to our aid?

Imagine if you will, that the next stranger you encounter might actually be an angel. How might you react differently to them? Not sure what you think, yet?

A woman took her husband to the emergency room in the middle of the night. When she left, alone, in the wee hours of the morning, she discovered a very dark parking lot with several teenagers standing near her vehicle. They had been drinking and the woman grew nervous. Suddenly, a man appeared behind her and tapped her on the shoulder. He struck up a conversation and walked her quietly to her car. Once she got into the car, she turned to thank him, only to discover that he had disappeared.

Or how about the man who was stuck in a snow storm and encountered a kind gentleman who offered him his gloves? The second man insisted he did not need them because he worked next door as a Doorman. The next day, when the man returned to thank the doorman, he discovered no such person worked there. Was he an angel?

Two elderly sisters, driving along a quiet country back road in Iowa had a puncture. Unable to change the tire, they sat and waited, hoping that help would soon arrive. Within seconds a car appeared and three young men jumped out offering to help. Their rescuers were handsome, courteous and happy. They were also fair-haired, blue-eyed, and all wore white suits.

One of the young men lay full length on the road to position the jack, and was scolded by the sisters for soiling his spotless attire. However, he made light of their worry and, when he climbed to his feet his suit was not stained at all, even though the road was greasy and slippery after a days rain. The tire was quickly changed, the young men ascertained the sisters had no further difficulties, and refusing to accept payment for their efforts drove away. However, as they continued down the country lane, their vehicle began to shimmer brightly, until the car was almost transparent and then, with a final pulse of brilliant light, it vanished altogether. The sisters are convinced that they were helped by angels.

Apparently, dozens of experiences have been recorded from all over the United States of angels coming to the rescue of stranded travelers with punctured tires. The angels are always young, smiling and playful, but become solemn and silent as they perform their duty of changing the wheel. When their mission is accomplished their otherwise unremarkable vehicle dematerializes in a magical shimmer. A woman with uterine cancer is visited by a tall, dark stranger with deep blue eyes three days before she is to enter the hospital for surgery. The stranger states: I am Thomas. I am sent by God. He proceeds to raise his right hand and the incredible heat coming from his hand, and a strong white light passing over her body, convinces the woman she is cured of the cancer. In fact, test

results prove negative, prompting her doctor to acknowledge he had witnessed a medical miracle.

LET'S GET TWO QUESTIONS ABOUT ANGELS OUT OF THE WAY FIRST.
SHOULD WE PRAY TO ANGELS AND CAN WE COMMAND ANGELS?

1st PRAYER-The question is: "If I can pray directly to God, why pray to angels, who are lesser beings?" Actually, there is no need to pray directly to angels. No advantage is gained in praying to an angel versus praying directly to God. God's holy angels delight to do his will, and will never disobey his commands.

The bigger questions is: Do we need angels? Does God need angels? The answer to both questions is no. God is all-powerful, and he can do everything without help. But, in his great love, God created the angels to help all who believe in him. Hebrews 1:14 says, "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" You do not need to pray to angels, but you also need to be aware that they are a part of the wonderful provision God has prepared for you. Martin Luther wrote, "An angel is a spiritual creature created by God for the service of Christendom and the church." Do not ignore God's gift of angels; instead, be aware of their presence and thank God for them. Even though you will always find what you need in the triune God, God will also send his angels if you pray to him for help. Just like God, the angels will always be there for you. It is God's choice. Psalm 91:11 says God will send angels to help us. Don't hesitate to ask God to send his angels. We are not admonished to pray TO them.

2nd Can we Command Angels? We all know that angels are to minister to us, but can we give them instructions directly or do we give them instruction through the name of Jesus?

Though angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Hebrews 1:14), I know of no Bible instances where humans were able to give them instructions either directly or through the name of Jesus. On the contrary, we have no control over the work of the angels. We know that they are above us since Jesus had to make Himself lower than the angels in order to come down and be born and suffer as a man (Hebrews 2:7-9). Hebrews also speaks of those who had entertained angels unawares (Hebrews 13:2). That is we were not aware of their presence--even when they are visible as people.

Even in the Old Testament, where we see angels actively working with people. Yet they are not at the bidding of men. The angel refused to reveal to Manoah, the father of Samson, his name. Though the angels who came to deliver Lot cooperated with Abraham and Lot, they certainly did not accept orders from them. When Lot failed to leave Sodom in a timely manner, the two angels forcibly took Lot and his immediate family out of town (Genesis 19:15-16).

The biblical way for the commanding of angels is found in several places. It is this: the people of God pray; the Lord hears their prayer; the Lord sends His angel or angels to do a work. Believers on earth do not have control over the angels.

Moses spoke of when the children of Israel "cried unto the LORD, he heard our voice, and sent an angel, and brought us forth out of Egypt" (Numbers 20:16). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's image not knowing what God would do (Daniel 3:17-18). But God in His mercy "sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God" (Daniel 3:28). The Hebrew children did not order up the angel of the Lord, God did it. God "sent his angel" to deliver Daniel from the mouths of the lions in the den of lions (Daniel 6:22). The church in Jerusalem prayed for Peter when he was in prison (Acts 12:5). But when Peter was delivered, he testified that "the Lord sent his angel, and has delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews" (Acts 12:11). The Christians praying for Peter were so surprised when he showed up at the door that they almost did not let him in. Certainly, they did not command any angel to go get him.

All these passages and others show that we do not command angels and angels do not obey the commandments of men. They are God's "holy angels" (Matthew 25:31; Revelation 14:10).

Hebrews 1:14—Are they not all—There is not one angel that is elevated to the high rank of the Redeemer. Even the most exalted angel is employed in the comparatively humble office of a ministering spirit appointed to aid the heirs of salvation. "Ministering spirits." A "ministering" spirit is one that is employed to execute the will of God. The proper meaning of the word here—leitourgika (our word "liturgy") is, "pertaining to public service," or "the service of the people" (laos) and is applied particularly to those who were engaged in the public service of the temple. They were those who rendered aid to others; who were helpers, or servants. Such is the meaning as used here. They are employed to render "aid" or "assistance" to others—to wit, to Christians. "Sent forth." Appointed by God for this. They are "sent," are under his control; are in a subordinate capacity. Thus, Gabriel was sent forth to convey an important message to Daniel; Dan. 9:21-23. "To minister."

The following methods of angelic insolvent on our behalf are noted in the Scriptures: (1) **THEY FEEL A DEEP INTEREST IN US HUMANS.** Jesus says, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents;" Luke 15:10. Thus also he says, when speaking of the "little ones" that compose his church, "in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven;" Matt. 18:10.

(2) **THEY FEEL A SPECIAL INTEREST IN ALL THAT RELATES TO OUR LIVES.** SO PETER SAYS OF THE THINGS PERTAINING TO REDEMPTION, "WHICH THINGS THE ANGELS DESIRE TO LOOK INTO;" 1 Pet. 1:12. In accordance with this they are represented as praising God over the fields of Bethlehem, where the shepherds were to whom it was announced that a Savior was born Luke 2:13; an angel announced to Mary that she would be the mother of the Messiah Luke 1:26; an angel declared to the shepherds that He was born Luke 2:10; the angels came and ministered to Him in His temptation Matt. 4:11; an angel strengthened Him in the garden of Gethsemane Luke 22:43; angels were present in the sepulcher where the Lord Jesus had been laid, to

announce His resurrection to His disciples John 20:12; and they reappeared to his disciples on Mount Olive to assure them that he would return and receive his people to him self, Acts 1:10.

(3) THEY APPEAR FOR THE DEFENSE AND PROTECTION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD. Ps. 34:7, "The angel of the Lord encamps round about them that fear him, and delivers them." An angel opened the prison doors of the apostles, and delivered them when they had been confined by the Jews; Acts 5:19. The angel of the Lord delivered Peter from prison when he had been confined by Herod; Acts 12:7-8.

(4) ANGELS ARE SENT TO GIVE US STRENGTH TO RESIST TEMPTATION. AID WAS THUS FURNISHED TO JESUS IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE, WHEN THERE "APPEARED AN ANGEL FROM HEAVEN STRENGTHENING HIM;" Luke 22:43. The great trial there seems to have been somehow connected with temptation; some influence of the power of darkness, or of the Prince of evil. The temptations which occur in life all have the marks of being under the control of dark and malignant spirits. They roam at large "seeking whom they may devour;" 1 Pet 5:8. What, therefore, can be more appropriate than for the pure angels of God to interpose and aid us.

(5) THEY SUPPORT US IN AFFLICTION. SO AN ANGEL BROUGHT A CHEERFUL MESSAGE TO DANIEL; THE ANGELS WERE PRESENT TO GIVE COMFORT TO THE DISCIPLES OF THE SAVIOUR WHEN HE HAD BEEN TAKEN FROM THEM BY DEATH, THEY ATTEND DYING SAINTS, AND CONDUCT THEM TO GLORY. THUS, THE SAVIOUR SAYS OF LAZARUS THAT WHEN HE DIED HE WAS "CARRIED BY THE ANGELS INTO ABRAHAM'S BOSOM;" Luke 16:22. Is there any impropriety in supposing that the same thing may be done still? No doubt the angels are still among us. I am sure yours are sitting with you right now.

But I have this nagging question. Since God is always with us, why do we need angels?

I believe that God uses angels because we are not always ready, able, or willing to face God directly. Remember when Elijah fled from the wicked Jezebel, after he had defeated all the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel? The man was exhausted and depressed, and he went out and hid in a cave and asked God to take his life. The guy was wasted. Well, God didn't enter conversation with Elijah right away. First, God sent an angel, who brought the prophet food and drink, told him to eat and get more rest. This happened twice. Then, finally, Elijah encountered God in the "still, small, voice."

God wants us to live fully as human beings, and while we're in the space and time we call our life on Earth, we learn gradually what it is to be spiritual beings, too. We learn over a lifetime what it means to pray. We begin to accept that possibly we have powers of the soul that were not apparent before. Angelic encounters help us begin to relate to a universe and a world of the spirit that we are just beginning to know.

With God, and in the spiritual realm, there is no past, present, or future. We just happen to be living in time right now. I think that what the angels were doing centuries ago is not

much different from what they are doing today. They still pull us out of physical danger and influence our dreams and our senses in order to help us do what we need to do and go where we need to go. They still help our prayers do God's will in the world. Together with the angels—as well as the saints, those who have gone before us—we bring God's kingdom to life in the here and now. I believe because I have experienced angels directing my path and that of others.

A LADY IN MY CHURCH IN Griffin was dying. According to her sitter she would call her into her bedroom 2 or 3 times a day and tell the sitter to get those two men sitting over in the corner of her bedroom to leave. This went on for days until one day she called in the sitter and told her the same thing but then, as if the supernatural light of God opened her eyes, she said, oh never mind its just two angels that God has sent to take me home and that day she died.

Virginia was a member of our church who most thought was a grouchy old woman and she was. She got to the point she could not come to church so I visited often. One day the church got a call from a friend saying she was very ill and would I please come. I was in the middle of some thing with a group of folks from the church but an urging made me stop and leave. When I walked into her house and saw her lying on the sofa I said out loud that we needed to get her to the hospital right now. She sat up on the sofa and screamed at me, NO! I went over and sat down next to her and she said hold me in your arms and pray for me. So I gently picked her up and drew her to my chest and began to pray in her ear quietly. It was then that I noticed she gradually stopped breathing. When it was obvious she had died I laid her back down as she expelled her last breath. Her friend said, maybe she was waiting for you. I do not know but I know this it certainly must have been an angel of the Lord who kept her alive until I got there, directed by some unseen force to be with her when she died. This has happened to me on at least three occasions. Do I believe I can ask God to send His holy angels to help me and others. YES I DO. HOW ABOUT YOU.