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The Work of Angels in Relation to Believers

The Bible has a great deal to say on this subject: First, the good angels rejoice when one is saved (Luke 15:10).

Second, angels have guardianship over believers through general protective care. All children have guardian angels (Matt. 18:10), and every believer has a guardian angel (Heb. 1:14). In fact, a guardian angel is “assigned” to a person as soon as he is saved. Psalms 34:7 and 91:11 teach that nothing can happen to a believer outside of God’s will because of the general protective care of angels. These verses do not teach that nothing bad can happen to believers, but that nothing can happen outside of God’s will.

Third, angels are often used to save or rescue believers from specific situations. For example, angels were used to rescue Lot (Gen. 19:1-22). Other instances abound, including Genesis 32:1-2; I Kings 19:5-6; II Kings 6:17; Dan. 3:24-28; 6:22; Acts 5:17-20; and 12:6-11.

The fourth work of angels is to guide believers into truth and actions. In Matthew 1:20-21, an angel instructed Joseph to believe Mary’s story that she really was a virgin, although she was pregnant. And an angel instructed Cornelius to send for Peter that he might preach the Gospel to him (Acts 10:3-8). In Acts 27:23-24, an angel guided Paul as well.

The fifth function of angels in relationship to believers is that of answering prayer. In Daniel’s case, for example, this happened twice, when an angel was used to answer the prophet’s prayer for more revelation (Dan. 9:20-23; 10:12-13). In the New Testament, prayers for Peter’s release from prison were answered by an angel’s rescue of the apostle (Acts 12:1-19).

The sixth purpose of angels in relationship to believers is one of encouragement (Acts 5:18-20; 27:23-25). The seventh work of angels is to carry the soul to its abode in heaven when a believer dies (Luke 16:22).

The eighth role of angels is to serve as spectators of believers, observing to see how we are acting and responding: In Luke 12:8-9, the faith of a believer is confessed before the angels. Later, angels observe when one is saved (Luke 15:10). Angels also observe the sufferings of believers (I Cor. 4:9). Other examples are seen in I Corinthians 11:10, I Peter 1:10-12 and I Timothy 5:21.

The ninth ministry of angels in regard to believers is to serve as guardians over local churches. Not only do individual believers have guardian angels, but every local church has a guardian angel. This is seen in Revelation two and three, where each letter is addressed to the angel of a specific church.

Finally, what should the believer's relationship to angels be in light of the nine previous works? First, like Daniel, believers may certainly feel wonderment and amazement at the ability and work of angels (Dan. 8:16-17; 10:1-9). Second, believers can appreciate their ministry (Heb. 1:14). Third, believers may not worship angels (Col. 2:18; Rev. 19:10; 22:9). Fourth, in the future, believers will judge (I Cor. 6:3) fallen angels at the Great White Throne judgment.

Hebrews 1:14: "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" The word "ministering" comes from a Greek word meaning "serve." Angels are spirit-servants who render aid, and this aid is rendered to the heirs of salvation in the outworking of God's purposes on earth.

What form does this service take? Such ministry can involve protection (Ps. 91:11), guidance (Gen. 19:17), encouragement (Judge. 6:12), deliverance (Acts 12:7), supply (Ps. 105:40), empowerment (Luke 22:43), as well as occasional rebuke (Num. 22:32) and judgment (Acts 12:23). And angelic service is rendered largely unseen and often unrecognized (2 Kings 6:17; Heb. 13:2).

Notice that Hebrews 1:14 says angels are sent to render service to the heirs of salvation. God has specifically sent and appointed angels to carry out tasks on behalf of believers; humans do not invoke or manipulate them. We must never forget that angels assist us because God has ordained it that way. There is never any sense that the sent one is more significant than (or takes the place of) the divine Sender.

God's angels act to carry out only God's commands. There's not a single Bible verse that portrays an elect, holy angel of God acting independently from God. Psalm 103:20 makes explicit reference to God's angels "who do his bidding, who obey his word."

Because only God sends angels on our behalf, our focus of attention must ever be on the God who sends them. God's holy angels do not seek praise or worship for the things they do. In fact, they discourage it and point to God as the only one worthy of worship (Rev. 22:9). The apostle Paul flatly condemned the worship of angels in Colossians 2:18. God Himself explicitly commands that only He is to be worshiped (Exodus 20:5-6).

This leads us to the single most important point of this article. In the words of John Calvin, "As God does not make [the angels] ministers of his power and goodness to share his glory with them, so he does not promise us his help

through their ministry in order that we should divide our trust between them and him." Indeed, Calvin says, the angels "do lead us away unless they lead us by the hand straight to him, that we may look upon him, call upon him, and proclaim him as our sole helper; unless we regard them as his hands that are moved to no work without his direction; unless they keep us in the one Mediator, Christ, that we may wholly depend upon him, lean upon him, be brought to him, and rest in him."

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