

CHURCH. SUPPLEMENT 14

[CHURCH RESTORING MINISTRY] ANGELS AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE

What does the Bible teach about angels?

God normally works through Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Bible and the Christians of the Church! But in special circumstances, God also works through his angels. We will learn who the angels are, how they relate to Jesus Christ and what their functions are with regard to Christians and non-Christians.

A. ANGELS

1. **The nature of angels.**

Angels are mentioned 108 times in 17 books of the Old Testament and 165 times in 17 books of the New Testament. The word “angel” (Hebrew: mal’ak, Greek: angelos) means “one sent”, “messenger”, or “envoy”.

When God created the universe, he also created the different kinds of angels. Angels were created by Jesus Christ and for Jesus Christ, that is, for the realisation of Christ’s purposes (Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:14). Angels are also called “sons of God”, because they were *created* by God.

Likewise Christians are called “sons of God”, because they are *recreated* by God (Job 1:6; Rom 8:9-16). However, in Genesis 6:2, the term “sons of God” does not refer to angels, but to believers, while the term “daughters of men” refers to unbelievers.

Angels are higher than people in the order of creation, but lower than people in the order of grace (Hebrew 2:7,16). Angels are “spiritual beings” and have no flesh and bone (Hebrews 1:14; Luke 24:39). They are *persons*, because they can reason, speak, choose and act. They do not marry and are therefore neither male nor female (Mark 12:25).

2. **The number of angels.**

The LORD is often called “the LORD of hosts” (Hebrew: JaHWeH Tseba’ot) (Isaiah 1:9). “The hosts” refer to the uncountable number of angels around his throne, who form part of his council (1 Kings 22:19; Job 1:6; 15:8; Jeremiah 23:18,22), sing his praises (Job 38:7; Psalm 148:2; Luke 2:13) and do his will (Psalm 103:20-21).

The Lord has a mighty army of angels. “The chariots of God are tens of thousands” (Psalm 68:17). They are well equipped and are divided into companies (Luke 2:13). Jesus Christ could ask his Father for help and immediately have more than 12 legions of angels ready to act on his behalf (a legion is about 4000 to 6000) (Matthew 26:52-53; cf. 2 Kings 6:17)! When Daniel and John speak of “ten thousand times ten thousands of angels”, they are saying that God’s angels are uncountable (Daniel 7:10; Revelation 5:11).

3. **The abilities of angels.**

Angels possess a *moral* nature, because they could choose to obey or disobey God (2 Peter 2:4). They have intelligence, but are *not omniscient* (all-knowing), because they did not know about God’s plan of salvation, nor do they know the time of Christ’s second coming (2 Samuel 14:17; 1 Peter 1:11-12; Matthew 24:36). They can sing with joy, praise and worship God (Isaiah 6:3; Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 5:11-14).

Some angels are depicted as having wings and they can fly (Psalm 18:10; Revelation 14:6). They can move with the speed of the wind and can serve God with the strength of fire (Ezekiel 1:14; Hebrews 1:7). However, they are *not omnipresent* (present everywhere), because they can only be at one place at one time (Daniel 9:21-23). They are stronger than the arrogant people in the world (2 Peter 2:11), stronger than the demon-princes of countries (Daniel 10:13) and stronger than Satan himself (Revelation 20:1-3). However, they are *not omnipotent* (all-powerful), because they can be resisted for some time by the evil forces (Daniel 10:12-14). Angels see the face of God (Matthew 18:10) and are examples of absolute obedience to God (Psalm 103:20-21; Matthew 6:10).

4. **The appearance of angels.**

Angels are usually *invisible* (Colossians 1:16), but they can become *visible and appear to people* (Luke 1:11). Sometimes they appear like ordinary men (Genesis 18:1), sometimes in their appearance they are dressed in white or shining clothes (Luke 24:4; Acts 1:10) and sometimes their appearance is simply awesome and terrifying (Daniel 10:5-11,15-19). Angels can appear in dreams (Matthew 1:20), in visions (Zechariah 1:8-11) and in real life (Genesis 18:1 – 19:22). Angels can still appear to people today (Hebrews 13:2)!

5. The kinds of angels.

There are two kinds of angels, God's angels and the devil's angels. God's angels are called "the elect angels" because God elected them not to fall into sin (1 Timothy 5:21). They are holy angels (Mark 8:38) and angels of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). They are "ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14).

The devil's angels are angels who have rebelled against God or sinned against God (Revelation 12:7-9; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6). The evil angels form an army of the devil (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 12:4,9). They are liars (John 8:44) and continually do sin (cf. 1 John 3:8-10). Some of the devil's angels appear as territorial spirits, exercising influence over a whole country (Daniel 10:12-14,20).

6. The orders of angels.

When Christ created the angels, he created them as visible and invisible thrones, powers, rulers, authorities and dominions. These words describe the different orders of angels (Colossians 1:16). All these orders of angels are now in submission to the resurrected and ascended Christ and have no power apart from Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:21; 1 Peter 3:22). The Bible describes some of these orders of angels.

(1) The cherubim.

The cherubim are angels, who reveal the power, majesty and glory of God and who guard God's holiness in heaven (Psalm 99:1; Ezekiel 10:1-22), in his descent to the earth (Psalm 18:10), in the Garden in Eden (Genesis 3:24), in the tabernacle (Exodus 25:18-22) and in the temple (1 Kings 6:27-29).

(2) The seraphim.

The seraphim are angels around God's throne, who extol his character and inspire people to approach God with awe (Isaiah 6:1-8).

(3) The archangels.

The archangels are very important angels, who fight against the devil and his angels, like Michael (Daniel 10:13; Revelation 12:7-9).

(4) Individual angels.

Sometimes God brought a special message from God to Daniel (Daniel 9:20-23), to Joseph (Matthew 1 :20-23), to Zechariah (Luke 1:11-20) and to Mary (Luke 1:26-38).

No angel knows God's eternal plan of salvation. The prophets in the Old Testament knew more than the angels. Although the prophets knew something about Jesus Christ, the full and complete revelation only came through Jesus Christ and his apostles (Hebrews 1:1-2; 1 Peter 1:10-12)!

(5) The fallen angels.

See manual 8, supplement 13. Satan was originally a guardian cherub (Ezekiel 28:15-17). When Satan fell, he swept many other angels into sin together with him (Revelation 12:4). Since then these fallen angels are called "the angels of Satan" (Revelation 12:9), or demons or evil spirits (Matthew 12:22-28,43-45).

Some fallen angels preach "a different gospel" than the gospel that comes from the God of the Bible and therefore they and the people who believe in their message are "accursed" (Greek: anathema) (Galatians 1:8; 1 Timothy 4:1! False religions refer to these fallen angels as their "gods" (1 Corinthians 8:4-5) and worship them as their "gods" (1 Corinthians 10:20).

7. The service of angels.

The most important task of angels is to exalt God. They are depicted as standing around God's throne and singing his praise day and night (Daniel 7:9-10; Revelation 5:11-14). Their second task is to obey God's Word and to do whatever he commands them to do (Psalm 103:20-21; Matthew 6:10).

(1) The ordinary service of angels.

Angels are God's instruments to carry out God's providential care of the world. "From one (blood or man) God had made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" (Acts 24:26). Deuteronomium 32:8 in Hebrew says, "When The Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided (the whole earth among) all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples, according to the number of angels (NIV: the number of the sons of Israel)." The rule over the different nations was divided among a corresponding number of angels.

After the fall of Satan and his angels into sin, these evil angelic governors of countries are portrayed as hostile principalities and powers (Daniel 10:12-14,20; cf. Daniel 10:21; 12:1). The apostle Paul calls them "the powers of this dark world spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). Before the first coming of Christ the angels present themselves before God when they are called to give an account of their service (Job 1:6).

“The coming world” that was inaugurated with the first coming of Christ (cf. Hebrews 9:10), was no longer subjected to angels, but to Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:5-9).

(2) The extraordinary service of angels.

Angels are God’s instruments to carry out God’s salvation of his people. They are sent to serve believers, that is, those who will inherit salvation in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:14). They watch what is happening with believers, talk to believers, protect believers, rescue believers, care for believers, guide believers, strengthen believers, fight on behalf of the believers and carry believers after death into God’s presence (Luke 16:22). They are present in the Church and learn from the Church about the wisdom of God’s plan (1 Corinthians 11:10). They mediate some special messages of God to certain people, communicate blessings to God’s people and execute judgements upon God’s enemies.

The activity of angels was most prominent in the great turning points of the history of salvation.

Angels were prominent:

- in the days of the patriarchs (Abraham) (Genesis 19:1)
- in the days of law-giving (Moses) (Exodus 3:2)
- during the period of exile and restoration of Israel (Ezekiel 1)
- at the birth of Jesus Christ (Mary) (Luke 1)
- at his resurrection (Matthew 28:1-7)
- at his ascension (Acts 1:9-11)
- during the ministry of the apostles (Acts 5:19)
- at the second coming of Christ (Matthew 2:30-31)

By being hospitable to strangers, some Christians have entertained angels (Hebrews 13:1). There are many accounts of non-Christians from the other world-religions that have been visited by an angel in a dream or in a vision and have thereafter turned to Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

B. ANGELS AND JESUS CHRIST

1. Who is the Angel of the LORD?

In some passages of the Bible, “the Angel of the LORD” (Hebrew: malak JaHWeH) is identified directly with the LORD (JaHWeH) himself, while in other passages he is distinguished from the LORD.

(1) The angel of the LORD is the Revelation of the LORD.

In Exodus 3:2-15, the Angel of the LORD appeared to Moses in flames of fire from within a bush. Then he identified himself as “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” and revealed his name as “I am who I am”. This name means:

- that it is impossible to describe the Being of God or express it in any name
- that God is unchangeable and faithful to his covenant.

Here the Angel of the LORD is the visible Revelation of the LORD. Read John 1:18 and 17:6. Compare the Angel of the LORD that revealed God to people in the Old Testament with Jesus Christ that revealed God to people in the New Testament.

(2) The angel of the LORD is the Presence of the LORD.

In Exodus 23:20-23, the LORD promised Moses and Israel to send the Angel who bears his name ahead of them, in order to guard them along the way and to bring them to the place he had prepared for them. In verse 22, the Angel of the LORD and the LORD himself are interchangeable personalities, because it says, “Listen carefully to what *the angel* says and do all that *I* say.” Moreover, the Angel of the LORD can forgive sins (verse 21), something only the LORD can do (Micah 7:18-19). The name of the LORD is in him, that is, the LORD, who reveals himself in this Angel, is really present.

In Exodus 33:2,14, the LORD promised that his Angel would go before them and explained to them that in this way “the LORD’s presence” is going with them. Here the Angel of the LORD is the Presence of the LORD with his people. Read Matthew 1:23 and Mark 2:5-7. Compare the Angel of the LORD with Jesus Christ, who is called “Immanuel” (God with us) and who forgives sins as God does (Mark 2:7,10).

(3) The angel of the LORD is the Protector and Deliverer from the LORD.

In Psalm 34:7 and 35:4-7, the Angel of the LORD encamps around those people who fear the LORD and he drives their persecutors away. Here the Angel of the LORD is the LORD as Protector and Deliverer. Read John 10:9-10. Compare the Angel of the LORD with Jesus Christ, who saves and protects his sheep.

(4) The angel of the LORD is the Judge from the LORD.

In 1 Chronicles 21:15-19,27, the LORD sent the Angel of the LORD to destroy a part of Jerusalem as a judgement of king David’s sin. Here the Angel of the LORD is the LORD as Judge. Read Revelation 19:11-16. Compare the angel with the LORD with Jesus Christ, who will judge the unrepentant nations.

(5) The angel of the LORD is the Mediator between the LORD and his servants.

In Zechariah 1:8-11, the LORD sent a group of riders on horses to go throughout the earth in order to survey it. When they returned, they reported to the Angel of the LORD. Here the Angel of the LORD is the Mediator between the LORD and his servants. Read 1 Timothy 2:5. Compare the angel of the LORD with Jesus Christ, who is the Mediator between God and men.

(6) The angel of the LORD is the Intercessor for others with God.

In Zechariah 1:12-13, the angel of the LORD addressed the LORD Almighty, pleading for mercy for Jerusalem and the towns of Judah. Here the Angel of the Lord is the Intercessor for others with the LORD. Read Hebrews 7:25. Compare the Angel of the LORD with Jesus Christ, who always lives to intercede for his people.

(7) The angel of the LORD is the Advocate, who speaks to the LORD in another's defence.

In Zechariah 3:1-7, the high priest Joshua stands before the Angel of the LORD while he is accused by Satan. The Angel of the LORD, who is called "the LORD" in verse 2, defended him and took away his sins. Here the Angel of the LORD is the Advocate, who speaks to the LORD in another person's defence. Read 1 John 2:1-2. Compare the angel of the LORD with Jesus Christ, who speaks to the Father in defence of Christians.

(8) The angel of the LORD is the Mediator of the covenant.

In Malachi 3:1-5, the Angel of the LORD is called "the Lord" (Hebrew: Adon) as an indication of his majesty as King and Judge and he is called "the Angel or messenger of the covenant" (Hebrew: malak ha-berit) (because he is the Mediator of the covenant) (cf. Hebrews 8:6). "He will come to the LORD's temple like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap." Here the angel of the LORD is the Mediator of the covenant in both the Old and New Testaments. In verse 5 he is identified with the LORD himself, who comes to refine and purify as well as to judge. Compare the angel of the LORD with Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and men, who at his first coming purified Jews and Gentiles (Matthew 3:10-12) and who will judge everyone at his second coming (John 5:22).

(9) Conclusion.

It is clear that the Angel of the LORD is not a created angel. The Angel of the LORD is in the Old Testament the visible revelation (appearance) of the LORD himself (Hebrew: JaHWeH). He is to be identified with the Lord Jesus Christ before he took on a human body in the New Testament. Jesus Christ is in the New Testament the visible revelation of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). The difference is this: In the Old Testament God appeared in the form of a man without taking on the nature of man (Genesis 18:1-2). In the New Testament God took on the nature of a man in Jesus Christ (John 1:1,14). After the first coming of Jesus Christ, the Angel of the LORD does not appear again.

Both the Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament and Jesus Christ in the New Testament were sent by the LORD and had similar ministries, namely, revealing, mediating, interceding, leading, protecting, saving and judging. The Angel of the LORD is distinct from God the Father and God the Spirit, because they never take on the human nature as he does (See also Genesis 16:7-14; 22:11-18; 31:11-13).

2. Angels in comparison with Jesus Christ.

In Hebrews chapters 1-2, Jesus Christ is compared to the angels. In Hebrews 1:1-14, seven facts are stated about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, which bring out his greatness and show why the revelation given to him is the highest revelation God can give. The comparative adjective "better" is used 13 times in the book of Hebrews to contrast Jesus Christ in his New Testament order with his Old Testament order.

(1) The message of Jesus Christ is God's final word to people (Hebrews 1:1-3)!

Jesus Christ is clearly the last and final Prophet whom the LORD God had promised in the Old Testament! He is the One through whom God will bless every nation on earth (Galatians 3:14,16). A person from whatever religious background that does not listen to Jesus Christ will be cut off from God's people (Deuteronomy 18:18-19; Acts 3:21-26)!

Because God has no greater Messenger than Jesus Christ (see Matthew 22:33-44; Luke 2:34) God has no further (supplementary or later) message than the gospel and the New Testament message!¹ God has spoken his final word in and through Jesus Christ (verse 1)!

In Hebrews 1:1-3 seven facts with regard to Jesus Christ are enumerated that throws light on his greatness and show that the revelation given to him is the highest revelation God can give!

- The first fact. Jesus Christ is the heir of all things (verse 2). "I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession" (Psalm 2:8). He is heir of the created universe (Hebrews 1:10-12) and also of "the world to come" (Hebrews 2:5).

¹ Mohammed of the Islam and Joseph Smith of Mormonism are therefore not prophets that bring a supplementary message from the God of the Bible to people! Mohammed is not "the seal of the prophets", because long before him, Jesus Christ spoke God's final word (Acts 3:22-24; Hebrews 1:1-2)!

- The second fact. Jesus Christ is the Creator of the worlds (Greek: aiónes)(verse 2). The plural points to the created things (matter, energy, space and time) (Proverbs 1:22-23; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 11:3).
- The third fact. Jesus Christ is the visible Radiance (Greek: apaugasma) of God’s invisible glorious attributes (verse 3). The radiant Light is of the same Substance (Greek: Homo-ousios) as the Source of light (“Light from Light”).
- The fourth fact. Jesus Christ is the visible Impress (exact representation) (Greek: charaktér) or Image (Greek: eikón) of God’s invisible Divine being (Greek: hupostasis). What God is in Essence, is revealed in Christ. Seeing who Christ is, is seeing what God the Father is like.
- The fifth fact. Jesus Christ sustains all things by his powerful (creative) word (Greek: rémati tés dunameós) (Hebrews 1:3). “In him all things hold together” (Greek: sun-histémi) (perfect tense)” (Colossians 1:17). He not only continues its existence (as Atlas bearing the world), but carries all things forward on their appointed course.
- The sixth fact. Jesus Christ had *once for all time* provided purification for sins (Greek: poieó) (aorist tense).² Atonement of sins is something no one else can do or did!
- The seventh fact. Jesus Christ sat down (Greek: kathizó) (aorist time) *once for all* at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

This emphasis on the superiority of Jesus Christ above angels is given to prevent Jewish Christians from being led astray by all kinds of misleading teachings (Hebrews 13:9). Also the letter to the Colossians shows that a false teaching existed in which angels were worshipped (Colossians 2:18).

(2) The position and title of Jesus Christ is more excellent than that of angels (Hebrews 1:4-14).

The various Old Testament quotations in Hebrews 1 and 2 show that the final message of God (the New Testament), which was communicated by Jesus Christ, is safeguarded by even more majestic sanctions than those that attended the law (the Old Testament), which was communicated by angels (Hebrews 2:2).

- The first quotation. Psalm 2:7 (Hebrews 1:5).

“You are my Son; today I have become your Father (Greek: gennaó) (perfect tense).” These words have never been spoken to angels! Angels may collectively been called “sons of God”, but never “the Son of God”! These words come from the liturgy for an enthronement in the Middle East, but here at the enthronement of David, but are first fulfilled in the Messiah-King (Mark 1:11; Luke 1:32; Acts 13:33). “Today” refers to the glorification of Christ: his resurrection, ascension, and enthronement (Psalm 110:1). From all eternity he is “the Son of God”, but begins to exercise his right and privilege since the completion of his work of salvation.

- The second quotation. 2 Samuel 7:14 (Hebrews 1:5).

“I will be his Father, and he will be my Son.” 1 Chronicles 17:11-14 proves that this does not refer to Solomon, but to the Messiah. Also Romans 1:3-4 says that Jesus Christ is “from all eternity the Son of God”, but within human history was born with a weak human nature, but resurrected with a glorious human nature.

- The third quotation. Deuteronomy 32:43 (Hebrews 1:6).

(a longer Greek text), “Rejoice, ye heavens, along with him, and let the sons of God worship him; Rejoice, o ye nations, with his people, And let all the angels of God ascribe strength to him.” Also Psalm 97:7. “Let all God’s angels worship him”. “Again” (Greek: palin) does not refer to a second coming, but to a second contrast with angels. “Firstborn” refers to the fact that he already existed before the creation and inherits all of creation. The angels are summoned to worship him (instead of God the Father). When he is brought into the inhabited world (Greek: oikoumené) (including angels), refers to when he was glorified (cf. John 5:23). Then he was introduced as the King of the coming world (the new world order).

- The fourth quotation. Psalm 104:4 (Hebrews 1:7).

“He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire.” The Hebrew text says, “Who makes winds his messengers; flames of fire his ministers”. Thus, the forces of nature carry out God’s will. But here the angels are depicted as swifter than the wind and fiercer than fire in carrying out God’s will.

- The fifth quotation. Psalm 45:7-8 (Hebrews 1:8-9).

“Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.” Psalm 45 celebrates a royal wedding. The first part is addressed to the king and the second to the queen. The quotation is from the first part. The king (from the royal house of David) is addressed in typical hyperbolic language characteristic in the East. He is the viceroy of the God of Israel through whom God carries out his plan. But these prophetic words are fulfilled in the Messiah King. He is addressed as “the Son of God” and “God” because he is the Radiance of God’s glory and the Exact Representation of his Being! All created things, including angels, are subject to transitoriness of time and things, but Jesus Christ and his kingship remains for ever! There is no end to his kingdom! And only his kingdom is characterised by complete righteousness (Psalm 89:15; Isaiah 11:5)! “The

² The absence of a perfect participle in Latin, has led to the use of the present participle here in the Latin Vulgate Bible as the equivalent of the Greek aorist participle (“katharismón tón hamartión poiésamenos” became “purgationem peccatorum faciens”) (Hebrews 1:3). This led to the notion that Christ in heaven is in the present time continuing to make atonement for sins. That is why the mass in the Roman Catholic Church is celebrated daily! But the aorist tense teaches that sins have been atoned for once in history at the death of Jesus at his first coming! The mass in the Roman Catholic Church cannot and does not add anything to the completed work of salvation of Jesus Christ at his first coming!

anointment” does not refer so much to when he received the Holy Spirit at his baptism (Mark 1:10; Acts 10:38), as to “the joy that is set before him” at the accomplishing of his task (Isaiah 61:1-5; Hebrews 12:2). His “companions” (partners) (Greek: metochoi) are not the kings of the surrounding countries or angels, but rather Christians (“many children” or “brothers” (Hebrews 2:10-11; 3:14).

- The sixth quotation. Psalm 102:25-27 (Hebrews 1:10-12).

“God says” in verse 6 also applies to verse 10. And: In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment, they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.” Even the enormous long period of the created universe finally comes to an end but Jesus Christ, who is here addressed as “Lord” (Greek: kurie), remains for ever! The New Testament writers apply what is said about God in the Old Testament to Jesus Christ in the New Testament (for example: Isaiah 45:23 in Philippians 2:10-11 and Isaiah 8:13 in 1 Peter 3:15).

- The seventh quotation. Psalm 110:1 (Hebrews 1:13-14).

“Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” In the Old Testament this referred to the enthronement of Solomon, but here to the enthronement of Jesus Christ. God promises him victory over all his enemies. The prophet Daniel (7:13) and Jesus himself (Mark 14:62) refer to this. The highest exalted angel Gabriel may “stand before God” (Luke 1:19), but only Jesus Christ may “sit” at the right hand of God (the unique place of honour)! Angels stand in order to carry out a command swiftly. Angels are but “ministering spirits sent to serve Christians” (verse 14)³.

(3) Angels have mediated the law, but Jesus Christ has mediated the gospel.

In Hebrews 2:1-4 we read that the superiority of Jesus Christ above the angels is based on the fact that the angels communicated the Old Testament ceremonial law to the prophets (Deuteronomy 33:2; Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19), but that Jesus Christ communicated the Gospel (John 1:17).

The Old Testament describes the punishments for transgressions of the Old Testament law. How shall Christians then escape if they ignore such a great salvation of Jesus Christ in the New Testament? God confirmed this ministry with the signs, miracles and spiritual gifts that accompanied the ministry of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:22) and thereafter the ministry of the apostles (Acts 2:43).

(4) Angels administrated the old world-order, while Jesus Christ administrates the new world-order.

In Hebrews 2:5 we read that, while angels executed the administration of the universe before the incarnation of Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ inaugurated his reign over the new world-order from the time of his exaltation and enthronement and he will complete it at his second coming (Acts 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:28). This new world-order of *realities* far surpasses the old world-order of *shadows* (Hebrews 8:5-8,13; 10:1). “God left nothing that is not subject to him” (Hebrews 2:8).

“Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour” (Hebrews 2:8-9). We cannot see man exercising his God-given authority and right as lord and master of the creation. We do yet see that all things subjected to man (Psalm 8). But we do see (with the eyes of faith) that the Man of God (Jesus Christ) is clothed with sovereign power. Jesus Christ is fulfilling this promise to man in his place! The Militant Church within the kingdom of Christ is growing! But because many unbelievers and other non-Christians and demons have not yet submitted to Jesus Christ, also Jesus Christ “waits for his enemies to be made his footstool” (Hebrews 10:13). This means that although Jesus Christ is the rightful ruler of everything and all, everything and all do not yet acknowledge his sovereignty!

(5) Angels cannot save people from their sins but Jesus Christ saves people from their sins and their fear of death.

In Hebrews 2:7 we read that by his incarnation Jesus Christ was made a little lower than the angels. Jesus Christ fulfilled the words of Psalm 8:5-6 by becoming the true Representative of the human race. He humbled himself to a state lower than that of the angels and took on the state of sinful and lost man (Philippians 2:5-8).

In Hebrews 2:14-16 we read that the devil had power over death, but that Jesus Christ by his resurrection from the dead had reduced him to impotence. For natural people physical death is a frightful reality. And the devil uses this fear of death as a means of intimidation, compelling people to do his will. However, for people who believe in Jesus Christ, the meaning of death has been transformed from being a judgement for sin and a terrible bondage to being a blessing and the final liberation from the suffering in this world.

When a Christian dies, death will take on the character of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Luke 23:46)! The spirit of the Christian ascends immediately to Christ in heaven (Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:23), but his body remains temporarily in the grave until the resurrection of the dead. Physical death can never separate them from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39)! Jesus Christ took on the human nature, not to save angels, but to deliver people who believe in him!

³ But note Acts 7:55 – Jesus stood to welcome Stephen!

3. Angels in the life of Jesus Christ.

(1) Angels announced the coming of Jesus Christ.

In 539 B.C., the angel Gabriel announced the coming of Jesus Christ to Daniel (Daniel 9:21-27). Later he announced to Zechariah the birth of the forerunner of Jesus Christ, John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-25). He also announced to Mary the birth and the human and divine nature of Jesus Christ (Luke 1:26-38). Later an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and announced the virgin birth of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:18-25).

(2) Angels during the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

When he was born, an angel announced the birth of Jesus to shepherds and a great company of angels appeared and praised God (Luke 2:8-15). A little later, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, ordering him to flee with Mary and Jesus to Egypt, because king Herod planned to kill him (Matthew 2:13-18). Later an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, ordering him to return to the land of Israel (Matthew 2:19-23).

When Jesus began his public ministry, after he was tempted by the devil, angels came and served him (Matthew 4:11). Three years later, when Jesus prayed in Gethsemane on the night before his crucifixion, an angel appeared and strengthened him (Luke 22:43-44). When a large crowd armed with swords and clubs arrested Jesus, Jesus said to Peter that he could call on his Father and more than twelve legions of angels would at once be put at his disposal. However, Jesus chose not to call in their help in order to fulfil the Scriptures and die to save sinners (Matthew 26:52-56).

(3) Angels during the exaltation of Jesus Christ.

Angels were present at the *resurrection* of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:1-7, Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-8; John 20:10-13). An angel rolled the stone of the tomb away, not to let Jesus out, but to let people into the tomb to see that he was resurrected. This angel's appearance was awesome and the guards were terrified of him "and became like dead men" (Matthew 28:4). Several angels moved about the tomb when the women came to balsam the body of Jesus. The angels said, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen" (Luke 24:5-6)!

Forty days later, when Jesus ascended to heaven, two angels stood beside his disciples and announced the second coming of Jesus (Acts 1:10-11). Revelation 5:1-14 describes the *enthronement* of Jesus Christ in heaven immediately after his ascension. Only Jesus Christ was worthy to break the seals of the scroll with writing on both sides, because only he died as a sacrificial Lamb on the cross and only he triumphed through his resurrection from the dead. Only Jesus Christ can reveal and execute what stood written in the scroll about Gods history of salvation and judgement. At his enthronement, standing in the centre of God's throne, the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders and uncountable angels sang to the praise of his glory: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise" (Revelation 5:12)! And every creature on earth echoed that praise.

In 1 Peter 3:22 and Ephesians 1:21 we read that Christ now sits at God's right hand, with angels, authorities and powers submitting themselves to him. In Ephesians 1:22 and Hebrews 2:5 we read that from now on the world was no more subjected to angels, but that God placed all things under the feet of Jesus Christ and appointed him to be head over everything.

(4) Angels during the second coming of Jesus Christ.

In Matthew 24:30-31 and 25:31-32 we read that all the nations will see Jesus Christ return with power and great glory. Jesus Christ will send his angels with a loud trumpet call and they will gather Christ's elect from everywhere and separate people one from another in the final judgement. In Matthew 13:24-43 and 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 we read that Jesus Christ will send his angels to weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. Angels will be present when Jesus Christ punishes them with everlasting destruction and shut them out of his presence. The angels will be present when Jesus Christ acknowledges those who belong to him, because they acknowledged Jesus Christ among the people on earth (Luke 12:8-9). And the angels will be present when Jesus Christ rewards each person according to what he has done (Matthew 16:27).

C. ANGELS AND BELIEVERS

1. Angels watch Christians.

Angels are very interested in God's work through the Christian Church. The Church does not exist for itself, but for God and God's glory! God makes his manifold wisdom known to people through Jesus Christ and his apostles (Hebrews 1:1-2; 1 Peter 1:10-12a), but to angels through the Christian Church (Ephesians 3:10; 1 Peter 1:12b). The Church is a mirror in which God's manifold excellences are reflected and the angels are very interested in the progress of the Church. God's wisdom reconciles seeming irreconcilables: God in Jesus Christ produces life by means of death and reconciles Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles), who believe in Jesus Christ.

Angels see and rejoice when sinners from any religious or secular background come to repentance (Luke 15:10). Angels continuously watch to see whether Christians live their Christian life according to the biblical instructions and if they serve God without partiality (1 Timothy 5:21). Angels watch and they see how Christians are persecuted for their faith

in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 4:9). Nevertheless, God has forbidden his angels to act as a liberation army (cf. Matthew 26:52-53), because the moment of definite victory over the forces of evil has not yet arrived. God has also forbidden Christians to fight so-called “holy wars”!

Angels were present at the creation of woman from man and they are still watching today to see whether women are continuing to recognise God’s creation ordinance or not (1 Corinthians 11:10). God’s creation ordinance is that Christian women should recognize that they were created for man and for the glory of man and that therefore they should recognize that God made man the head of the woman (Genesis 2:18; 1 Corinthians 11:2,7,9). This means that women should be subject to men in the Christian marriage (Ephesians 5:22-25; Colossians 3:18-19) and in the functions in the Christian Church (1 Corinthians 14:33-38; 1 Timothy 2:11-14; 3:2). Knowing that the angels of God are constantly watching her should make it easier for a woman to be subject to her husband in marriage and to the elders (as men) in the congregation.

2. Angels appear to Christians and talk to Christians.

The angel Gabriel explained visions to Daniel (Daniel 8:15-19; 9:20-23). This same angel announced the birth and nature of Jesus Christ to Mary (Luke 1:26-38). An angel warned Joseph about impending danger and guided him to safety (Matthew 2:13-19). An angel instructed the apostles to preach the gospel openly (Acts 5:17-20). An angel instructed the evangelist Philip what to do in order to ensure that an Ethiopian government official hears the gospel (Acts 8:26). Sometimes angels urge Christians to act by saying, “Quick, get up!” because lost time never returns (Acts 12:7).

3. Angels promote the proclamation of the gospel.

Angels do not proclaim the gospel, but God uses his angels to *make the proclamation of the gospel by Christians possible*. An angel instructed the apostles to proclaim the gospel publicly in the Jewish temple (Acts 5:17-20). An angel instructed the evangelist Philip *where to go* in order to proclaim the gospel to a Ethiopian government official (Acts 8:26). An angel led the Roman military officer Cornelius to the apostle Peter, in order that he and his relatives and friends might hear the gospel (Acts 10:1-8,22,30-33). An angel rescued Peter from prison in order to ensure that this great apostle proclaimed the gospel far and wide (Acts 12:5-11). An angel appeared to Paul, in order to ensure that the apostle would not die during the shipwreck, but stand trial before the mightiest ruler on earth, Caesar of Rome himself, (so that he could probably testify to him about Christ) (Acts 27:22-25).

4. Angels act on behalf of Christians.

(1) Angels protect God’s people.

Angels encamp around and deliver those people who fear God and depend on God’s ways (Psalm 34:7; 91:1,11-12). God’s angels appeared as horses and chariots of fire all around the prophet Elisha and his servant to defend them against a whole army of enemy soldiers who came to capture the prophet (2 Kings 6:14-17).

When Daniel’s three friends were persecuted for their faith in the living God, they were tied up and thrown into a blazing furnace. However, an angel came within the blazing oven, untied them and protected them from the flames. “The satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them” (Daniel 3:27). Later Daniel himself was persecuted for his faithfulness to the living God and he was thrown into a den of hungry lions. However, an angel came within the den of lions and shut the mouths of the lions. They did not hurt Daniel and no wound was found on Daniel (Daniel 6:22-23).

With regard to children that were brought to Jesus, Jesus said, “See to it that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:10). Jesus warned his disciples not to regard children (or people who have the attitude of children) as unimportant. God regards them so highly that he appointed even his most illustrious angels to keep watch over them. The phrase “angels who see the face of God” is not limited to a certain class of angels, but includes all the angels, even the highest ranking angels. And the phrase “their angels” is not limited to the angels of little children, but also includes the angels of all those who become like little children, that is, the true Christians. This verse does not teach that every individual Christian has his own individual guardian angel, but it does teach that all the angels in heaven watch over all the Christians in the world. These angels are also not mediators between people and God and they do not speak to God on behalf of these people. Angels only take care of God’s people and are deeply interested in the salvation and progress of Christians (1 Peter 1:12).

During the tribulation of Christians between the first and second coming of Jesus Christ, angels put the seal of the living God on the foreheads of the servants of God, that is, on all Christians (Revelation 7:1-4; cf. 22:3). This is a figurative sign that God protects them from evil and harm, probably so that they can live for God and serve God and that they will not fall under God’s present judgements on the earth (cf. Ezekiel 9:3-6; Revelation 9:4).

(2) Angels rescue God's people.

An angel rescued the apostles from prison in order to ensure the continuous proclamation of the gospel (Acts 5:17-20). An angel rescued Peter from prison, breaking the chains around his wrists, opening the doors and shutting the eyes of the prison guards, in order that Peter could continue to preach the gospel (Acts 12:5-11)!

(3) Angels provide God's people with basic needs.

The angel of the LORD provided the tired, hungry and despondent prophet Elijah with water and food. He touched him and strengthened him so that he could travel a very long and difficult journey (1 Kings 19:1-19).

(4) Angels guide God's people.

An angel guided the journey of Abraham's servant and helped him to find a suitable wife for Isaac (Genesis 24:7,40).

(5) Angels strengthen God's people amidst their trials.

An angel strengthened Jesus Christ during his prayer on the night before he was crucified (Luke 22:40-44). An angel encouraged Paul when he was caught in a violent storm at sea and was being shipwrecked (Acts 27:21-26). Angels are present when a believer dies. They carried a dead believer directly into the presence of God (Luke 16:22; Philippians 1:23).

(6) Angels fight on behalf of God's people.

The angels of God fight against the angels of the devil (Daniel 10:12-14,20-21). Although the earthly empires of Persia and Greece had great power over God's people in exile, their corresponding evil angelic princes were conquered by the holy angelic prince of God's people. God is in complete control of people and events on earth and announces ahead of time that God's people will be completely victorious (Daniel 10:12-14,20-21; Romans 8:37-39; Revelation 17:14).

D. ANGELS AND UNBELIEVERS

Angels throughout history are occupied with exercising God's administration over the inhabited universe. They execute God's providential care of believers and unbelievers on earth (Acts 14:17). They are instruments when God saves believers on earth. They are also instruments when God executes his judgements over the disobedient nations and people. At the end of history, when Jesus Christ returns to this earth, the angels will execute God's final judgement over those who reject his love and his salvation in Jesus Christ.

1. The Angel of the LORD judged king David.

The Angel of the LORD punished king David because he had disobeyed God (1 Chronicles 21:14-30).

2. The Angel of the LORD judged a complete army of enemy soldiers.

The Angel of the LORD killed 185 000 soldiers of the mighty Assyrian army in one night, because their commander had insulted the living God (2 Kings 19:9-19).

3. An angel judged Satan by binding him.

In the form of an apocalyptic picture, a single angel bound the dragon. He reduced Satan to impotence to the extent that Satan can no longer keep the proclamation of the gospel away from any nation on earth (Revelation 20:1-3). This is *an apocalyptic picture of Jesus Christ himself who bound Satan* at his first coming 2000 years ago (cf. Matthew 12:29-30; 24:14; John 12:31-32; Revelation 12:7-9)!

4. An angel of the Lord judged an arrogant political leader.

King Herod not only opposed the work of Jesus Christ by murdering his servants (Acts 12:1-2) and by putting his servants in prison (Acts 12:3-18), but also arrogantly allowed the crowds of people to elevate him to the position of a god! An angel of the Lord struck him down and he was eaten alive by worms until he died (Acts 12:19-24). This is a serious warning to all political and religious leaders when they persecute Christians and set themselves up as great political or religious leaders in their countries.

5. An angel judges the wickedness on this present earth.

An angel symbolically mixes the imperfect prayers of God's people with the perfect prayers of Jesus Christ. When the limited and imperfect prayers of Christians go up to God's throne, they are made completely acceptable and perfect by Jesus Christ and his prayers for Christians. In answer to the prayers of Christians that are involved in spiritual warfare and suffering on earth God through his angel symbolically hurls fire from heaven onto the earth, accompanied by voices (rumbling), thunder, lightning and an earthquake.

The message of the lightning, rumbling and thunder is that a unique event in history is at the point of happening (for example, the vision of God on his throne in the centre of everything, Revelation 4:5, precedes the first coming of Christ and his enthronement, Revelation 5:1-14). Likewise, the prayers of Christians precede the present judgements of God on people on the earth (Revelation 8:3-5).

6. Angels execute God's warning judgements throughout history.

Angels execute *God's present warning judgements* throughout history in this world. Their judgements affect great parts of the earth, sea, rivers and universe through natural calamities (Revelation 7:1; 8:6-13; cf. Ezekiel 14:21), affect the soul or spirit of people through the activities of evil spirits (Revelation 9:1-12) and affect the physical, social and economic welfare of people through the terrible wars that rage between the nations (Revelation 9:13-19). Jesus Christ reveals that all these calamities are warnings of the coming final judgement and at the same time they are present judgements that call all the people on earth to repent now from their continuing transgressions against Jesus Christ and the Ten Commandments (Revelation 9:20-21; cf. Exodus 20:1-17).

7. Angels execute God's final judgement at the end of history.

Angels will also execute *God's future final judgement* of the whole earth at the end of history (Revelation 9:15,18; 15:1; 16:1-21; 19:17-18). At the second coming of Jesus Christ, the angels will first gather God's elect people, that is, all Christians, to welcome Jesus Christ in the air and to marvel at him (Matthew 3:12a; 24:40a,41a; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:10).

Later on that same last day (Matthew 25:31-33; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15), the angels will drive the unbelievers and wicked people before Christ's judgement throne (Matthew 3:12b; 13:25,30,41,48; 24:40b,41b; 25:31-32). While all the Christians will not be condemned (John 5:24; 10:28; Romans 8:1), but their works will be judged (Matthew 25:34-40; 1 Corinthians 15:12-15), the non-Christians, unbelievers and wicked people will be judged (doomed). They and all their evil practices will be thrown into the fire of hell, which is the place prepared for the devil and his angels. There they will weep and gnash their teeth forever (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9; Matthew 3:12b; 13:36-43; 25:41-46; Revelation 20:11-15).