

Newsletter July 2012

This newsletter contains edited excerpts taken from Book II, Chapter 14.6 *Angel Worship* wherein we considered angelic beings and mankind's false worship of them. Angels are *created* intelligences. They are created as spirit beings. However, they differ greatly from God, the pure eternal Spirit, who is the First and the Last, having no beginning or end. Angelic beings had a beginning in the moment God created them. Just as we were created by God for his pleasure and purposes, so were his angelic beings created.

Inasmuch as angels are purely spirit-beings, they do not have physical bodies, as do mortal men. Yet, it would seem that they have a localized "spiritual form" in which their being is fully contained. Consequently, an angelic being cannot exist everywhere at once; they are not omnipresent but must move from place to place. We are never told in Scripture about the specific characteristics of this "spiritual form" of angels. The best explanation would be to suggest that while men are physical beings consisting of material substance, angels are spirit-beings consisting of pure energy, which is akin to fire (cf. He.1:7). Therefore, having no physical substance, angels are ordinarily invisible to the eyes of mortal men (2Ki.6:14–17). Nevertheless, angels have on occasion demonstrated an ability to appear to men as if they were contained in a human form (Jn.20:12; Ac 1:10,11 etc.). That would suggest that they are able to adapt the pure energy of their form into visible energy — or perhaps convert it into a pseudo-physical substance for short lengths of time. In Scripture, visible angels are often said to be dressed in extremely white garments or are clothed within a bright light (cf. Ac.1:10). The splendor of their appearance is such as to startle and even stun men (Mt.28:4). Perhaps what is being observed is a glimpse of their true nature of pure energy seen as an extreme radiance of light within or about a projected visible form.

Because of their brilliance and attractive nature, there is a strong inclination for men and women to mistakenly seek to worship angels as if they were deity, whereas they are only fellow servants of God created in another form along side us (Re.22:8,9). We find in Scripture that angelic beings seem to be ranked into a hierarchy, with certain angels holding superior positions over others (Col.1:16; Ro.8:38). Unfortunately, angels are also divided into a group consisting of loyal angels, who have steadfastly served and honored God faithfully since their creation, and a second group made up of fallen angels (demons) led into their fallen state by Satan as he rebelled against the authority of God. Although Satan is now a defeated foe in the aftermath of the cross, he still seeks to steal the worship of men during the brief time remaining to him before Christ returns in judgment. Fallen angels are his devout agents that still have the same angelic form and beauty, as do loyal angels. Thus their fallen state would be indistinguishable by mortal men through any visible observation of them.

Many think that God assigns a personal angel being to look out for each of us and invisibly protect us behind the scenes from harm, although firm Scriptural evidence is lacking. While we cannot completely discount God sending an angel-messenger to Christians today, that visit would be most unusual indeed, inasmuch as we now have the Spirit of Christ living within us. Instead of placing our full trust and confidence in Christ who indwells us by the Holy Spirit, there is a dangerous tendency, even among Bible-based Christians, to seek out angelic beings to aid and instruct them in both personal decisions and theological matters. As Christians we must understand that our personal guardian is now the Holy Spirit who permanently indwells us. Christ through the Holy Spirit is closer to us than could be any mortal man or an angelic being. Through the Holy Spirit, we receive knowledge, wisdom, and comfort as He takes all that is Christ's and reveals everything

about Him to us. He primarily accomplishes this by guiding us through a diligent study of Holy Scripture.

Meanwhile, angelic beings are directly involved in a spiritual war that is going on in Heaven as well as upon the earth today. While man sits by mostly unaware, a war rages around us, because of us, against us, and for us. We are not speaking of the internal spiritual warfare that takes place within our souls, which was discussed in Book I, Chapter 7.5 of this work, but a war external to our being waged in the spiritual as well as the physical universe. Regrettably, mortal men, though ill equipped to contend with it, are often drawn into that great eternal struggle between good and evil, and far too often they become aligned on the wrong side of it, thus becoming pawns of Satan that to be wasted in the conflict.

Today, there is a great amount of interest in stories about angels directly intervening in the affairs of men. Many claim to have seen or even to have been personally visited by angels. Moreover, there is a tendency, even by Bible-based Christians, to accept fanciful third-party stories about various contemporary sightings of angels as fact without any tangible proof. Mankind it appears is always looking for some visible evidence to substantiate their faith, not realizing that faith itself is the evidence of things unseen and that to constantly seek substance in this world to bolster hope is to deny the efficacy of faith (He.11:1). Fanciful stories about angels tickle the interest of many today because of a growing mental speculation about the supernatural world, but to explore that interest can prove to be very dangerous since it is foreign territory to mortal men while it is Satan's natural domain.

The appearances of angel messengers were abundant in Old Testament times. The four hundred years between the testaments were silent on their part, but their ministry began anew at the birth of Christ as a host of angels announced Jesus' birth. During Jesus' formative years, angels protected Him from harm (Ps.91:12), and during the ministry of Christ, the attention of the angels was focused upon Jesus as He imparted the message of the Kingdom. Angels ministered to Jesus after his testing by Satan in the wilderness (Mt.4:11) and again in the garden of Gethsemane just before his crucifixion (Lu.22:43). Angels then announced Jesus' resurrection to his disciples (Mt.28:5,6; Mk.16:5,6). After Pentecost however, when the New Testament Church had been established, there was a notable reduction in the frequency of visible angelic visits. The apostles and the disciples were faithfully broadcasting the message of God's grace, and angels were still at work to be sure, but in an invisible supportive roll to protect and aid the Spirit-filled men who were now designated as the sole messengers of the Gospel.

Therefore, if an angel should visit one today imparting a certain message, we must seriously call into question why the angel became visible and even more significantly from whom he was sent. We must carefully try every spirit we should encounter (cf. 1Jn. 4:1). Satan is regularly sending his angel-messengers to unbelievers and even to the unwary among the elect. They can appear as an "angel of light" just as if they have a legitimate message from God (2Co.11:14). Most of their messages are cryptic ones that can be interpreted various ways or trivial ones that impart no specific revelation. Perhaps the only intent is to get a man or woman accustomed to seeing spirit visitors with the primary objective of getting their minds off of Jesus Christ, the Gospel, and God's Word. Nevertheless, the messages that fallen angels impart are not always so cryptic or trivial but are often out and out lies behind which is great evil intent. Satan is the father of lies, and his demons (fallen angels) are very willing to disseminate them for him. Fully trusting in such messages has often resulted in personal disasters including suicide and murder.

On occasion a wider deception is planned as the mesmerized individual is made to believe that they have received a special revelation from God. Coupled with the personal pride and charismatic personality of the human individual in which the lie has been planted, angel visitation can foster a cult leader. Just to cite one example, it was through an alleged appearance of a supposed angel named “Moroni” to Joseph Smith that the Mormon religion was fabricated (See *Newsletter March 2012* and Book III, page 375). Satan’s purpose in creating and perpetuating cults is to corrupt sound Christian doctrine and to undermine the effectiveness of the Gospel message — preventing many from coming to a genuine knowledge of the Truth and throwing a road block in the way of their salvation.

Finally, in the oft recited verse in Hebrews 13, verse 2, we read “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” This verse often comes up when discussing the possibility of contemporary angelic visitations. However, the epistle to the Hebrews was written during the transition period of the early days of the Church following the resurrection of Christ but before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70. During that period of a single generation, angels infrequently continued to appear to men. If a visitor should have turned out to be an angelic being that did not openly announce their nature, they that entertained them may not have realized that they were not mortal men as they themselves.

Unfortunately, most Bible readers, biased with traditional ideas about angelic beings, are not able to envision anything but a spirit-being when the word “angel” is read in Scripture text although the correct definition of the word “angel” derived from both the Greek word *angelos* and the Hebrew word *malak* is simply “messenger.” That must be clearly understood if we are to get a true sense of various verses of Scripture text. Today, God at times sends ordinary men and women to us to impart a message that we need to hear, and quite often, those men and women are not even aware that they are being sent for that purpose. We see that by entertaining strangers, we may indeed be communicating with a messenger from God unaware.

Therefore, the proper application of this verse is that we should not become so involved with our own group of close friends and relatives that we forget to entertain strangers who may turn out to be God-sent to impart some important bit of wisdom for our benefit. Those of our own circle are often caught up within the same paradigm as are we, and they can only reinforce our own notions. That can at times trap us into a way of thinking that blocks various aspects of the Truth, which a believer outside our circle may easily recognize. That entrapment has often opposed much-needed biblical reform in so many of our contemporary churches.

In conclusion, we find that angels are but created spiritual beings and fellow servants with us in the service of the Lord; they are not ever to be worshiped as any form of deity. To do so would give way to Satan’s evil desire to steal the worship of men away from God and garner it for himself through his hosts of fallen angels. The Apostle Paul had this to say regarding those who taught various forms of mysticism and Gnosticism in his day, “Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind” (Col.2:18). There can be little doubt that Paul was referring to satanically motivated worship of angels here. To accept the doctrine of angels would make one guilty of committing the same error, as did various Gnostics in Paul’s day (Ga.1:8). God alone is worthy of our worship and praise; to Him alone be all honor and glory (Ex.20:3-5). *Arthur J. Smith July 2012*