



Conducted by
James Gardiner

“WHEN Christ told the people of this world that they would be as the angels of heaven, in the life hereafter, exactly what kind of angels did he mean? Obedient angels or angels of the devil? When will this transpire? We are told that the dead in Christ will rise first but what of the people of this world? Will they become angels at the second resurrection? What was the origin of angels and what is their purpose and their destiny?”

The context

These questions come from a brother in the U.S.A., who says he enjoys the S.S. immensely, and to whom we send our good wishes and greetings. Our brother is asking a great deal, but I shall attempt to be helpful.

In the incident referred to Jesus was being tempted by the Sadducees on the matter of the resurrection, and they asked Him the hypothetical question of whose wife the woman at the resurrection would be who had had seven husbands. Their sarcasm was aimed at the idea that if there was any truth in the idea of a resurrection then seven husbands would be waiting “on the other side” for the one woman. People express similar doubts today when they say, “Ah but what about the people who have been blown to pieces in the war?” It is amazing the number of church members who doubt the actuality of the resurrection. The question of the Sadducees reflected their doubts, and Jesus took the occasion to point out that after our resurrection earthly marriage will be unknown and unnecessary for they

"are as the angels of God in heaven." (Matt. 22:32). It may be that we shall not actually be angels but we shall be as *the angels*, or like angels. A close examination of the parallel passage in Luke 20:36 shows that it is extremely doubtful that the "people of this world" will become angels for Jesus says, "But they which shall be *accounted worthy to obtain that world*, and the resurrection of the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage." We also learn from this same passage that such will be *equal with the angels* and will die no more.

Man

Therefore to the first part of the question I would say that it is a matter for grave doubt that the people "of this world" will become angels. Having said that it is therefore unnecessary to say whether they shall be obedient angels or angels of the devil. Those who will become equal to the angels, or as the angels, will be those "*accounted worthy to obtain that world*" (Luke 20:35).

When will this transpire? At the resurrection of the dead (Luke 20:35 etc.).

Certainly the dead in Christ will rise first, but I do not think that we can necessarily deduce from that fact that the dead out of Christ will take part in a later, second resurrection. I believe that the scriptures teach one general resurrection which will take place on the last day, and that simultaneously the good and the evil will be raised from the dead. I know that Rev. 20:5 talks about the first resurrection (and from that we assume a second resurrection) but whatever Rev. 20:5 may mean, I feel fairly sure that it does not refer to two resurrections of the dead, the good preceding the evil by the space of a thousand years. The resurrection will take place on *the last day* (John 6:44). Christ's final coming will also be on the last day and will be visible and audible. The last trumpet shall sound. Paul, in 1st Cor. 15:52, says that when the trumpet sounds the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. This will all transpire in *the twinkling of an eye*, not with any space of years between. So we can safely deduce that the resurrection of the dead will be on Christ's return, on the last day. The mention, by Paul in both 1st Cor. 15:52 and 1st Thess. 4:16 of the "trump of God" shows that the same resurrection is being referred to (*i.e.* there will be only one resurrection). Furthermore, the facts that the Judgement will also take place on the last day (John 12:48) and that the destruction of the physical earth will take place on the last day precludes any possibility of two resurrections with a space of years between.

Jesus said (John 5:28-29) "Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which *all* that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." Notice that the 'good' and the bad 'come forth' *in the same hour* — the same resurrection. The "resurrection of life" of the good will, therefore, be simultaneous with the evil receiving the 'resurrection to damnation'.

Angels

The third part of the question asks regarding the origin, purpose and destiny of angels. A small question which really requires a large answer and a great deal more study than I have been able to give it. Angels form a most fascinating topic for study.

The word "angel" is employed in several senses in the Bible, and we must observe the context in each case. Literally the word "angel" means "messenger", and in this sense even a human-being could function as an angel. But angels are more than messengers of God, for they occupy an altogether different stratum of

life from man. Jesus became flesh and a member of the humanity of this world; and Heb. 2:7-9 says that He was made "a little lower than the angels". Just as the family of man is a more elevated form of life, than the animal world, so the angels compose a higher form of life than the human family of this world. Paul in 1st Cor. 15, where he speaks of the differences in the flesh of man, animals and birds, speaks also of different kinds of bodies (but bodies nevertheless): in v. 40 he says, "There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another." Angels fall into the celestial class, and man the terrestrial, but nevertheless both have bodies with their own peculiar glory. Some people seem to think that because angels are spiritual creatures they are disembodied spirits, and that when they visited the earth they were merely given a suitable human body for use during their stay here — but is this so? Man's body is subject to the corrupting influence of age and decay, but an angel's body is not. The angel's body doesn't have to be a different shape from man's just because it is incorruptible (just as the body of Jesus didn't alter its form just because it had been resurrected from the tomb in an immortal state).

There are well over one hundred references to angels in the Bible, and thus are too numerous to quote. But perhaps if I present a few salient facts from these quotations it may be helpful towards forming some mental picture of these celestial beings. The quotation can always be traced by means of a concordance.

Appearance: look like men; lordly; "terrible" in countenance; mighty; swift in flight; like lightning; loud voice; white raiment; have tongues and speak well; great wisdom; countless in number.

Habitation: heaven, presence of God (except those cast down from heaven into chains awaiting the judgement).

Actions: spoke; ate; slept; carried a staff; held a sword; wrestled; ascended in a flame; could work destruction; slew 185,000; encamped; pursued; delivered (from fiery furnace); appeared in visions and dreams; ministered to Jesus; behold the face of God; do not marry; are ignorant of when "last day" will be; rejoice over sinners being saved; carried Lazarus to Abraham's bosom; stirred pool of Bethesda; rolled stone from Christ's grave and sat in tomb; opened prison doors; delivered the law; smote Herod with disease; will take vengeance at the Lord's coming; saw Jesus; worship God; can commit sin; can fly.

General: some have names (Gabriel, Michael); there are also probably different orders of angels such as seraphim and cherubim (who have wings). Also there are archangels (such as Michael). It seems each person has a "guardian" angel (Matt. 18:10).

From these brief notes it would appear to this writer that angels resemble man in appearance, but greatly transcend him in ability and power. Unlike man, they are not subject to decay, time or space, and are not limited by the natural and physical laws of this earth on which man presently lives. In Acts 6:15 we are told that Stephen's face looked like the face of an angel and it seems strange language if indeed there is not a strong similarity between the appearance of angels and men.

The origin of angels? We are apt to think that man was God's only creation, but it may well be that God has many creations. We are God's creatures on earth but angels are presumably God's creatures in heaven. It would seem that, just as man has had the bounds of his habitation fixed, so have the angels; and just as man has been given a framework of laws so have the angels. Jude 6 says, "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgement of the great day." This

passage (taken together with Matt. 25:41, which says "Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels") leads some to suppose that the devil is in fact a fallen angel.

The purpose of angels? "Are they not all ministering spirits" (Heb. 1:14). They are messengers of God and ministers (or servants) of God not yet entirely dispensed with: indeed Heb. 13:2 says, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares". Why mention it if the possibility is gone for ever?

Destiny of angels? The full quotation of Heb. 1:14 is "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." A careful reading of Hebrews chapters 1 and 2 reveals that although Jesus was made, like man, a little lower than the angels, He by His obedience to God has been exalted supremely higher than any angel and that we in His reflected glory and by His merits, have also been exalted above the angels. Thus they minister to the heirs of salvation and were literally very active in the early days of the church. In chap. 2 of Hebrews, v.5, the writer says that the world to come has not been put under the subjection of angels, but under Christ and His saints. This seems to have confirmation in 1st Cor. 6:3 where Paul in the matter of brother taking brother to law says, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world". Not only that but, "Know ye not that we shall judge *angels*, how much more the things that pertain to this life."

Matt. 13:39 and Matt. 25 tell us that at the coming of Jesus He shall be accompanied by countless angels, who shall assist him in executing judgement of this world. Their destiny seems to involve being in subjection to the heirs of salvation — Christians.

Space has again gone, but I hope these few remarks may have gone some way to answering the questions, or at least stimulating further study.