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Conducted by  
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**COULD** you please comment on the role of angels as expressed in Hebrews 1:14 — “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”

THE first chapter of Hebrews deals at some length with the exaltation of Jesus. He lowered Himself and became flesh — a member of the human family. Thus, like all other men, He was made “a little lower than the angels”. However, because He submitted Himself to the Father, God exalted Him above even the angels. Verse 14 of chapter one, expresses the staggering thought that Christ’s followers (the heirs of salvation) have also been exalted above the angels (through the merits of their Master).

Angels occupy the role of serving God in the work of the redemption of man and to be more specific, are sent forth to render service to those who shall inherit eternal life. Man, of course, was made higher than the animal kingdom, but lower than the angels. Those of the human family who have availed themselves of the favour of God and are, in effect, the heirs of salvation, have been so exalted that even the angels are sent by God to help and serve them.

#### Work Of Angels

It may well be that the term, “heirs of salvation” is broad enough to include the heirs of salvation in Old Testament times. If we confine it to New Testament times nothing is gained or lost; but one cannot ignore the activity of the angels in Old Testament times in ministering to those who certainly are the kind of persons we would expect to be heirs of salvation. Whatever function angels may have had before man was created their role after his creation was one of assisting in their salvation. If we look at one or two examples of angels at work in this capacity I think we shall notice that God intended them to rescue; to comfort; to provide succour and to assist those who are on their heavenly journey.

Firstly, let us notice that the angels have a great interest in each one of us and in the redemption of man. Luke 15:10 says, quoting Jesus, that “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” Can we imagine for a moment the scene in heaven of angels rejoicing because one of the human race has repented of his sins?

Also, in similar vein, let us remember what Jesus said when speaking of the "little ones" that constitute the church that "in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 15:10). Many brethren believe that Christ's statement here strongly supports the idea that each disciple has a guardian angel. Other passages of scripture believed to support the doctrine are Ps. 91:11; Heb. 1:14; and Acts 27:23. Such angels have ready access to the Father — always beholding His face. We are not told but we may be sure that there are vast numbers of angels. When the news of the birth of Jesus was brought to the shepherds, "Suddenly there was with the angel, a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God..." (Luke 2:13). Jesus on one occasion asked, "Thinkest thou that I cannot pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels." Daniel said, "Thousand thousands ministered unto Him" (Dan. 7:10).

Again, angels have a special interest in the salvation of men. Thus the apostle Peter could say of the things pertaining to redemption, "which things the angels desire to look into" (1 Peter 1:12).

In connection with the coming; the life; the death; and the resurrection of Christ the angels had an important and prominent role to play. An angel announced to Mary that she would be the mother of the Messiah, and other myriads of angels sang over the fields of Bethlehem — the heavenly host. (Luke 2:13). An angel declared to the shepherds that Jesus was born (Luke 2:10). Angels ministered to Jesus in His temptation (Matt. 4:11). An angel strengthened Him in the garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:43). Angels were at the sepulchre, where the Lord had been laid, to announce His resurrection. Angels appeared on Mount Olivet to assure men that Jesus would return as they had seen Him go (Acts 1:10).

Apart from the role the angels played in relation to the coming and going of Jesus it seems that their role falls under a few separate headings, For example

#### **1 To frustrate the wiles and devices of Satan.**

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." It is believed by many that Satan is a fallen angel. Whether or not that be so, verse 7 of Jude tells us of Michael the archangel contending with the devil.

#### **2 To punish wicked men**

(See Gen. 19:1-26; 2 Kings 19:35; Acts 12:23). These are but three of many examples. In 2 Kings 19:35 we see the power and strength of the angels, when we read that one slew 185,000 men in one night. In the example in Acts 12 an angel smote Herod and consumed him in horrible fashion because he strutted about as a God.

#### **3 To protect and defend the people of God.**

Again, only a few of the many examples can be mentioned. Two angels came to hasten Lot from the cities of the plain and to rescue him from impending destruction (Gen. 19). An angel opened the doors of the prison and freed the apostles after their arrest by the Jews (Acts 5:19). Thus also the angel of the Lord delivered Peter from the prison when he had been interred there by Herod (Acts 12:7-8).

The Psalmist says (Ps. 34:7) "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."

#### **4 To aid provisionally in bringing men to repentance.**

Acts 10:1-8 demonstrates the steps taken by an angel to bring together the bearer of truth with the seeker after truth. Some brethren strongly believe that those seeking for the truth will inevitably find it. Certainly in this case angels took a part in it. It was also an angel of God who instructed Philip to go south to Gaza to meet the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26).

**5 To give men strength to resist temptation.**

When Jesus was under great stress in the garden of Gethsemane we read that there appeared an angel from heaven strengthening Him (Luke 22:43).

**6 To take care of the living saints (2 Kings 6:15-23)**

See Dan. 3:25-28 concerning Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. See Dan. 6:22 where an angel came into the lions' den and saved brave Daniel.

**7 To comfort dying saints and bear their spirits home to glory.**

Thus Jesus mentions, when speaking of Lazarus the beggar that when the poor wretched man died he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. We are told that the rich man also died and was buried, Opinions differ, I know, concerning this matter, and some regard the incident as one of the parables of Jesus. There is nothing parabolic, however, about the angels mentioned in Luke 16:22, for they certainly carried Lazarus into Abraham's bosom.

**A Permanent Ministry?**

These, then, constitute a few examples of the office, function or role of the angels of heaven. Some readers will, no doubt, be able to think of other examples. Those itemised above stretch over times which include the Old Testament and the New. Many instances, however, of angelic intervention occur after Pentecost and rightly have a part in the church age, Many of us are perhaps intrigued to know if the work of angels continues today. I know of some brethren who believe that the activities of angels were confined to the early years of the church, just as some brethren believe that the phenomenon of demons was confined to that same period. I must say that I do not see any good reason why this must necessarily be so; and I don't think that we can be in any way sure that the statement of Hebrews 1:14 has no force today. In fact I am told that the grammatical construction of the verse is such that its application is permanent. I understand that, "sent forth" in Heb. 1:14 is the present participle and means "Being sent forth" continually as their regular service in all ages. (see Jamieson, Fausset and Brown's Commentary).

**Our High Privileges**

How honoured we should feel when we consider that the very angels of heaven are sent at God's behest to watch over and aid the heirs of salvation, Oh, what God has done for man! He formed the eternal plan. He sent His prophets to communicate His will. He sent His only Son to bear the message of mercy and to die that cruel death at the hands of men — the just for the unjust. He exalted the Son to heaven and placed the universe under His control that man might be saved. He sent His Holy Spirit into the world and upon His apostles. And He sends also His angels, as ministering spirits, to help and sustain them, attending to them in life and comforting them in death — bearing them to realms of glory. Angels rejoice over the repentance of just one person in this dark world of sin and sorrow.

May this knowledge help us to strive harder in preaching the gospel and to do more in reaching the lost. There may be at our shoulder at this very moment, in attendance upon us, one of those pure and celestial beings (sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation). May this be a means of encouraging us to be pure, as they are pure, and holy as they are holy.

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