

BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED

What God's Word teaches about

ANGELS

Gordon Lyons

KJV Edition

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Angels

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Part 1

Synopsis: Holy Angels

Holy angels, as distinct from fallen angels, are the highest order of *created* intelligences in the universe. These glorious moral and rational beings constitute an innumerable host of spirit beings who are mighty in power, but all of whom are subject to the will of the Almighty, Sovereign and Triune God. Once created, angels do not die; nor, since they are spirits, do they marry. There are several distinct orders of holy angels, including cherubim and seraphim. In the Bible, the only two angels known by name are the archangel Michael and the angel Gabriel. Angels are created to worship and serve God, and to act as ministering spirits on behalf of all his elect people. Although they are spirits, angels are capable of assuming human-like form. They are also capable of leaving the heavenly realms (at God's command), and of entering this earthly realm, occasionally appearing visibly in the form of a man.

Note 1

The Angel of the LORD

The phrase *'the Angel of the LORD'* (i.e., Yahweh), which occurs in the Old Testament, refers sometimes—not to an angelic being—but to a pre-incarnate appearance of God's Son (the Eternal Logos). Alternatively, this expression may refer to an appearance in angelic form of the LORD God himself. (Gen. 22:15-17; 31:11,13; Exodus 3:2,14; Judges 13:20,22)

Scripture References: Note 1

Genesis 22:15-17

⁽¹⁵⁾ And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, ⁽¹⁶⁾ And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: ⁽¹⁷⁾ That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

Genesis 31:11,13

⁽¹¹⁾ And the angel of God spoke unto me in a dream, *saying*, Jacob: And I said, Here *am*... ⁽¹³⁾ I *am* the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, *and* where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred.

Exodus 3:2

⁽²⁾ And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush *was* not consumed.

Exodus 3:14

⁽¹⁴⁾ And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

Judges 13:20-22

⁽²⁰⁾ For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on *it*, and fell on their faces to the ground. ⁽²¹⁾ But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he *was* an angel of the LORD. ⁽²²⁾ And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.

Note 2

Fallen Angels or Demons

Although created holy, angels were capable of sinning. Those who did not keep their first estate (i.e., holiness) were cast out of heaven. These rebellious angels are now being kept for the Day of Judgment, when they will be cast into the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels. These evil angels, or evil spirits, are known as the fallen angels (or demons). Unlike fallen mankind, there is no possibility of redemption for fallen angels. By contrast, those angels who maintained their first or original state of holiness and righteousness were subsequently confirmed in that state. These holy angels cannot now fall into sin and apostasy. (2 Peter 2:4,11; Jude 1:6; Rev. 12:7-12; 20:1-10)

Scripture References: Note 2

2 Peter 2:4

⁽⁴⁾ For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast *them* down to hell [Gk, *Tartarus*], and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;

2 Peter 2:11

⁽¹¹⁾ Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord.

Jude 1:6

⁽⁶⁾ And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

Revelation 12:7-12

⁽⁷⁾ And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, ⁽⁸⁾ And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. ⁽⁹⁾ And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

⁽¹⁰⁾ And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

⁽¹¹⁾ And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

⁽¹²⁾ Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

Revelation 20:1-10

⁽¹⁾ And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. ⁽²⁾ And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, ⁽³⁾ And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

⁽⁴⁾ And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and *I* saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received *his* mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁽⁵⁾ But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. ⁽⁶⁾ Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

⁽⁷⁾ And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, ⁽⁸⁾ And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom *is* as the sand of the sea. ⁽⁹⁾ And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. ⁽¹⁰⁾ And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet *are*, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever

Note 3

Worship of Angels Forbidden

Angels are *created* spirits. As such, they must never be worshipped; nor must they ever be considered as mediators between God and man. Angels are the servants or messengers of God. As Creator of all things, and as the Sovereign of the universe, God alone is to be worshipped and adored, world without end. God's angels must worship him and him alone—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is God blessed for ever, Amen. In the church, believers must worship no one else but God the Father and his Son, through the intercession of his Holy Spirit; all three Persons being co-equal and co-eternal, and forming only one true God who alone is worthy of worship, praise and honour throughout the eternal ages. As regards the work of redemption, Christ the Son of God is the only Mediator between God and man. Angels cannot intercede on behalf of God's people. This work is confined to the Son of God in his priestly office and to the Holy Spirit in his office as intercessor with God on our behalf. (Neh. 9:6; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 1:4-8; Rev. 7:10-12; 19:10; 22:8-9)

Scripture References: Note 3

Nehemiah 9:6

⁽⁶⁾ Thou, *even* thou, *art* LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all *things* that *are* therein, the seas, and all that *is* therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.

1 Timothy 2:5

⁽⁵⁾ For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

Hebrews 1:4-8

⁽⁴⁾ Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

⁽⁵⁾ For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee? *{Psalm 2:7}* And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? *{Samuel 7:14; 1 Chron. 17:13}*

⁽⁶⁾ And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. *{Deut. 32:43 LXX}*

⁽⁷⁾ And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. *{Psalm 104:4}*

⁽⁸⁾ But unto the Son *he saith*, Thy throne, O God, *is* forever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness *is* the sceptre of thy kingdom.

Revelation 7:10-12

⁽¹⁰⁾ And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

⁽¹¹⁾ And all the angels stood round about the throne, and *about* the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshiped God,

⁽¹²⁾ Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, *be* unto our God forever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 19:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, *See thou do it* not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Revelation 22:8-9

⁽⁸⁾ And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. ⁽⁹⁾ Then saith he unto me, *See thou do it* not: for I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.

Note 4

Angels Serve and Glorify God

Angels are *ministering* spirits. They are mighty in power, but they are not almighty. The holy angels fill the courts of heaven; they surround the throne of God and the Lamb, and they praise and glorify his holy and majestic name. In addition, the holy angels act as emissaries of Almighty God and of his Son Jesus Christ. They are sent forth to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation: i.e., the redeemed children of God. At all times, and in every respect, the office and work of the holy angels is subordinate to the office and work of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (Ps. 34:7; 91:11-12; Dan. 6:22; Heb. 1:13-14; Rev. 4:1-11; 5:1-14)

Scripture References: Note 4

Psalms 34:7

⁽⁷⁾ The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.

Psalms 91:11-12

⁽¹¹⁾ For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

⁽¹²⁾ They shall bear thee up in *their* hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

Daniel 6:22

⁽²²⁾ My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

Hebrews 1:13-14

⁽¹³⁾ But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? *{Psalm 110:1}*

⁽¹⁴⁾ Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

Revelation 4:1-11

⁽¹⁾ After this I looked, and, behold, a door *was* opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard *was* as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter. ⁽²⁾ And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and *one* sat on the throne. ⁽³⁾ And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and *there was* a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. ⁽⁴⁾ And round about the throne *were* four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. ⁽⁵⁾ And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and *there were* seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. ⁽⁶⁾ And before the throne *there was* a sea of glass like unto crystal:

and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, *were* four beasts full of eyes before and behind. ⁽⁷⁾ And the first beast *was* like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the

fourth beast *was* like a flying eagle. ⁽⁸⁾ And the four beasts had each of them six wings about *him*; and *they were* full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

⁽⁹⁾ And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth forever and ever, ⁽¹⁰⁾ The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

⁽¹¹⁾ Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

Revelation 5:1-14

⁽¹⁾ And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. ⁽²⁾ And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? ⁽³⁾ And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. ⁽⁴⁾ And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. ⁽⁵⁾ And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

⁽⁶⁾ And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. ⁽⁷⁾ And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. ⁽⁸⁾ And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four *and* twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

⁽⁹⁾ And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

⁽¹⁰⁾ And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

⁽¹¹⁾ And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;

⁽¹²⁾ Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

⁽¹³⁾ And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, *be* unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever.

⁽¹⁴⁾ And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four *and* twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth forever and ever.

Here we see that no one in all creation—not even the most exalted of the righteous and holy angels of God—was found worthy to open the book or to look upon it. The Son of God alone—the Lion of Judah—was able to perform this task: for he—the uncreated and eternal One—is alone worthy above all created beings.

Again, we observe that even the most exalted of the holy angels falls down in worship before the Eternal Son of God. The highest angels in heaven acknowledge the supremacy of the Son, and these mighty spirit beings praise, exalt and adore the glorified Lord Jesus—for he is Sovereign Lord of all creation; including the holy angels.

Related Bible Doctrines

The doctrine of angels is related to the Biblical teaching concerning the purposes of God in creation, providence, and redemption. Angels are moral, rational and highly intelligent spirits, constituting a much higher order of created life than mankind. Angels were created before mankind to dwell in the presence of God; to worship and serve him; and, after the creation and fall of man, to minister to the heirs of salvation. However, those angels who failed to keep their first estate of holiness, righteousness and honour, and who rebelled against God, were stripped of their great privileges and expelled from heaven. In the Bible, these rebellious fallen angels are referred to as 'Satan and his angels'; i.e., Satan and the demons (also known as *evil spirits*, or *unclean spirits*).¹

Preliminary Remarks

The Son of God is Pre-eminent Over Angels

Angels were created by God, through his Son. The Eternal Son of God is pre-eminent—and exercises absolute sovereignty—over all creation; including every form of angelic being. Thus, concerning God's Son, the Scripture says:

Colossians 1:15-17

⁽¹⁵⁾ Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

⁽¹⁶⁾ For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: ⁽¹⁷⁾ And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. (See vv.18-20)

Again, concerning the absolute supremacy of Christ over every created being, and over all kinds of powers and authorities, whether on earth or in heaven, the Scripture says:

Ephesians 1:19-22

⁽¹⁹⁾ And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, ⁽²⁰⁾ Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*, ⁽²¹⁾ Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: ⁽²²⁾ And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, (See vv.15-18)

Angels Worship the Lord Jesus

Glorious, privileged and honoured as the angelic beings undoubtedly are, their celestial glory pales into insignificance in the glorious and awesome presence of the Son of God. In his holy and majestic presence, every angel in heaven falls down and worships the Lamb.

¹ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: The Defeat of Satan and the Demons*, by Gordon Lyons.

Angels Worshipped Jesus at His Birth

When the Son of God was born in Bethlehem to the virgin Mary, the angel of God announced the Saviour's birth to the shepherds who were guarding their flocks by night on the Judean hillsides. This mighty and glorious heavenly messenger directed these shepherds and the people in general to seek for the newly born Son of God, and to worship him. Thus, God's Word says:

Luke 2:8-11

⁽⁸⁾ And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁽⁹⁾ And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. ⁽¹⁰⁾ And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ⁽¹¹⁾ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (See vv.4-12)

As soon as this celestial messenger had announced these good tidings to the shepherds, the night sky was illuminated with a vast throng of these glorious ministering spirits of God. As God's Word says:

Luke 2:13-14

⁽¹³⁾ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

⁽¹⁴⁾ Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. (See vv.15-20; see esp. v.20)

The fact that the holy angels themselves were involved in the worship of the infant Jesus, is confirmed by God's own Word, which says:

Hebrews 1:6

⁽⁶⁾ And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. {*Deut. 32:43 LXX*} (See Heb. 1:4-8)

Although far more exalted than mankind, and although dwelling in the immediate presence of God, yet the mighty and glorious angels of God were commanded to worship the holy child, Jesus.

Angels Worship Jesus in His Exaltation

These glorious holy angels will continue to adore, praise and worship the Son of God throughout the ages of the ages; for God has highly exalted his Son, and has given him the name that is above every name.

As the Scripture says:

Philippians 2:9-11

⁽⁹⁾ Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

⁽¹⁰⁾ That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth;

⁽¹¹⁾ And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (See vv.5-8; cf. vv.10-11 with Isa. 45:23)

Jesus Christ is Lord. He is King of kings and Lord of lords; and all God's angels worship him.

Angels are Not Mediators

Before considering the doctrine of angels in more detail, it is essential to note the absolute supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the complete subordination of angels to the Son of God. Failure to observe Christ's pre-eminence over all creation—including angels—has led to some serious errors of doctrine and practice, from the time of the Colossian heresy in the early church to the present day.

In the departures from the true Biblical teaching, angels have been afforded homage, praise and worship (Colossian heresy), or they have been afforded a position of mediation or intercession between God and men. It must be remembered, however, that there is only one Mediator between God and men. That person is Jesus, the Son of God—not any of the angels, nor any other person. (1 Tim. 2:5) Again, only two persons of the Godhead are involved in the work of intercession between God and men. These persons are God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—not any of the angels, nor any other person. There is salvation in no other name under heaven, except through faith in the name of Christ alone. (Acts 4:12)

Part 2

Doctrine of Angels

Angels are Created Spirits

The word 'angel' (Gk., ἄγγελος, *ággelos*) means *messenger* or *envoy*. The holy angels are God's messengers or ministering spirits. (Heb. 1:14)

Apart from the person designated as the '*Angel of the LORD*', all angels are created spirits. The spirits were created by God some time before the creation of mankind; for they were present at the creation of man; and many angels had fallen and had been expelled from heaven before the creation of mankind.

Angels are glorious and holy beings, possessed of mighty power. Unlike God, however, they are not all-powerful (omnipotent); nor do they know all things (omniscient); nor can they be in more than one place at the same time (omnipresent or ubiquitous). As spirits, the angels are invisible, except when they assume human-like form as in their appearances to many individuals and groups of people in the Bible.

As spirits, angels are not restricted by time-space limitations to the same extent as are human beings. On the contrary, angelic spirits are capable of moving from one part of the universe to another, seemingly, at very great speed. Thus, these glorious spirits can transport themselves from heaven to earth in a very short space of time. (Cf. Ezek. 1:14)

Angels have been seen to descend to the earthly realms (as at the birth of the Lord Jesus, and on many other occasions), and to ascend again to the heavenly realms.

Angels are Mighty

As celestial spirits, angels are assumed to possess great intelligence, will and power. However, their mighty power is subject to, and wholly dependent on, the will and power of God. Similarly, the angels' great power can be exercised only in accordance with the laws of the physical and spiritual realms. Holy angels are not at liberty to overrule the laws of nature, which God has established. Such overruling of natural laws is attributable to the command or will of God and to the providence of God—not to angels. Unlike the fallen angels, God's holy angels do not abuse their position by attempting to disrupt the natural order, which God has established for the government and preservation of the universe.

Concerning the mighty power of angels, and their submission to the will of God, the Scripture says:

Psalms 103:20-21

⁽²⁰⁾ Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.

⁽²¹⁾ Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. (See vv.19,22)

Again, the intervention of angels in the affairs of the world is not at the angels' discretion. Rather, such intervention is in response to, and according to, the express command or will of God. Angels, therefore, must not be regarded as intervening between God and ourselves (except insofar as they are acting as ministering spirits). Nor must we attribute to them the effects that, in reality, are due to either the grace or providence of God, or to the almighty and sovereign operations of the Holy Spirit.

Unlike God therefore— who is *uncreated Spirit*, and who is infinite in his perfections—the angels are *created spirits*, and their ‘perfections’ are limited or finite.

Angels are Exceedingly Numerous

The phrase, *the host of heaven*, can be used to refer either to the vast array of stars and other inanimate heavenly bodies, or to the vast company of angelic beings in the heavenly realms. In this latter sense, the Scripture says:

Deuteronomy 33:2

⁽²⁾ And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints [Heb., *holy (ones) or angels*]: from his right hand *went* a fiery law for them. (See vv.1-5)

At the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, the LORD in all his majestic glory was attended by myriads of invisible spirits: the ‘holy ones,’ or holy angels. Again, concerning the vast multitude of holy angels in the presence of God, the prophet Daniel says:

Daniel 7:9-10

⁽⁹⁾ I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment *was* white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne *was like* the fiery flame, *and* his wheels *as* burning fire.

⁽¹⁰⁾ A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened. (See vv.1-14)

And, reminding his readers of the glories of their heavenly calling and expectation, the writer to the Hebrews declares:

Hebrews 12:22

⁽²²⁾ But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, (See vv.18-24)

And Jude, the brother of James, says:

Jude 1:14-15a

⁽¹⁴⁾ And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints [Gk., ἅγιοι, *holy (ones)*], ^(15a) To execute judgment upon all... (See vv.3-16; cf. 1 Thess. 1:7-8)

In a vision, the apostle John also saw vast numbers of holy angelic beings:

Revelation 5:11-12

⁽¹¹⁾ And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; ⁽¹²⁾ Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. (See vv.6-14)

From the Scriptures, it is evident that the angels of God are exceedingly numerous.

Angels Do Not Marry

The Lord Jesus made it plain that angels do not marry; nor do they die. Thus, in response to the Sadducees, who questioned Jesus about the resurrection of the dead, Luke, the physician, writes:

Luke 20:34-36

⁽³⁴⁾ And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: ⁽³⁵⁾ But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: ⁽³⁶⁾ Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. (See vv.27-38)

Because of Adam's fall, all mankind is subject to ageing, decay and death: for ageing, decay and death—spiritual, physical and eternal death—is the wages of man's sin. Unless they are redeemed and reconciled to God in Christ, men and women will certainly die in their sins. However, since God's angels are holy beings, and therefore not subject to the consequences of sin, they cannot die. They continue to live indefinitely, without any ageing process and without any need of procreation to replenish their numbers.

Sexual Union between Fallen Angels and Fallen Mankind Highly Improbable

Angels are spirits, and therefore have not been created with the bodily organs or functions necessary for procreation. Consequently, it seems highly improbable that the illicit sexual union spoken of in Genesis chapter 6 between the 'sons of God' and the 'daughters of men' refers to a union between fallen angels and members of the fallen human race. (Gen. 6:3) 'Sons of God' is indeed an expression that is sometimes used to mean *angels of God* (Job 1:6; 2:1)—but not always. The same expression, 'sons of God,' is used often to refer to the *children of God* (i.e., professing believers). Therefore, it may well have had a different meaning in the context of Genesis chapter six. In view of the angels' apparent inability to engage in sexual relations, it certainly appears that some other explanation is to be preferred for this chapter.

Angels are Spirits

Invisible, Incorporeal, and Immortal

Angels are created spirits. (Heb. 1:4) They are invisible and incorporeal, and they do not possess a body or bodily features. Moreover, since they are intrinsically holy, they are not subject to ageing or death. They are immortal spirits. Again, angels are rational and moral spirits; i.e., they are morally responsible personal beings, endowed with faculties such as intelligence, reason, and will. In angels, the faculties of reason are far superior to mankind's faculties of reason, but they are infinitely inferior to those of God.

These mighty celestial beings were created by God; originally, in a state of righteousness, holiness and happiness. (Ps. 148:2,5; Col. 1:16) Those angels that subsequently fell from that state were expelled from God's presence. These fallen spirits are destined to endure the sufferings of that eternal fire spoken of by the Lord Jesus. (Matt. 25:41) Those angels that persevered in righteousness were confirmed in a state of holiness. These glorious holy angels worship and serve God continually.²

Angels May Appear in Human Form

In the Bible, angels are sometimes spoken of in terms that clearly indicate that, on occasions, these glorious spirits have become visible to mankind. On these occasions, the angels of God appeared to assume human (or human-like) bodily features.

² In this study, we are considering only the elect or holy angels. For information on the fallen angels, see *Bible Truths Explained: The Defeat of Satan and the Demons*, by Gordon Lyons.

It is, of course, recognised that certain parts of the Bible speak of visions, including angelic visions, which God grants to his servants (as, for example, in parts of the books of Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Revelation). Again, certain parts of the Bible are written in poetic form (e.g., The Psalms, and certain sections of the prophets, etc.). As will no doubt be appreciated, poetic expression includes the frequent use of figurative language. In both of the foregoing instances (visions and poetry), the bodily representations sometimes ascribed to angels should perhaps be understood figuratively, rather than literally. Leaving aside these figurative representations, however, it cannot be denied that physical, or apparently physical, features may be assumed by angels on specific occasions: for example, to permit them to be seen by, and communicate with, human beings.

It was precisely in this manner that two angels, appearing like men and dressed in brilliant and glorious 'clothing', were seen by the women at the tomb of the risen Lord Jesus. These holy messengers of God were able to communicate with the women, explaining to them what had become of their Lord, and reassuring their troubled hearts with the glorious message of the resurrection. (Matt. 28:2-5) There are many other instances in the Word of God where holy angels appeared to God's people as tangible glorious beings.

Part 3

Angelic Orders and Ranks

Although, in God's Word, reference is made to several categories of angels, the Bible does not attempt to delineate clearly these categories (except for symbolic purposes associated with the tabernacle or temple). We know only that the categories of angels include at least one archangel, in addition to cherubim, seraphim, and an innumerable multitude of other holy angels.

The Scripture tells us that there are seven angels who stand in the presence of God. (Rev. 8:2; cf. Tobit 12:15) One of these is the angel Gabriel. (Luke 1:19) Another is the archangel Michael. The remaining five, however, are not specified by name in the inspired Word of God.

In the apocryphal book of Enoch, seven angels (or archangels) are named, including Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. Again, in the apocryphal book of Tobit, the angel Raphael claims to be one of the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the saints to God, and who enters the presence of the Holy One. (Tobit 12:15) Another such angel is referred to as Uriel. (2 Esdras 4:1)

However, although to a limited extent useful for historical information, these apocryphal books were not included in the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures. Among conservative evangelical scholars, therefore, these books are not recognised as being inspired by God. These sources therefore cannot be relied upon to provide accurate, authoritative and infallible information on moral and spiritual matters; and this includes information concerning the holy angels of God. In seeking to learn something about these mighty and glorious celestial spirits, we must therefore limit ourselves strictly to what is revealed about them in God's own inerrant Word, the Bible; excluding apocryphal accretions or additions.

The Archangel Michael

The name *Michael* (Heb., *Mika-el*) means literally, 'Who as God?' or 'Who is as God?'

In the Bible, Michael is the only celestial being who is expressly termed an archangel. However, in Daniel chapter 10, verses 13 and 21 (and elsewhere), Michael is also referred to as a 'prince' or as 'one of the chief princes.' Clearly, this latter expression implies the existence of other angelic beings of the same or similar rank or station to Michael. This may include the seven angels who stand (or wait [to serve]) before the throne of God in heaven. (Rev. 8:2)

If, however, other angelic beings hold a similar rank or station to Michael, then it follows that, in Daniel chapter 10, the archangel Michael cannot be understood as a synonym for Christ. In the Old Testament, Christ is sometimes referred to as the *Angel of the LORD* or the *Angel of the Covenant* (or *Messenger of the Covenant*). (Mal. 3:1) But these expressions equate Christ with God, not with the archangel Michael. However glorious the holy angels and archangels may be, their glory cannot be compared with the infinite glory of the Son of God. The eternal Son of God is highly exalted above them all, and the object of angels' worship, praise and adoration.

In the Old Testament, the archangel Michael is revealed as one who takes a special interest in the people of Israel. Thus, concerning Michael, the guardian prince of Israel, it is written:

Daniel 10:21

⁽²¹⁾ But I will show thee that which is noted in the Scripture of truth: and *there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince.* (See vv.1-20; see esp. v.13)

And, concerning a time of great tribulation and persecution for God's people, the Scripture says:

Daniel 12:1

⁽¹⁾ And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation *even* to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. (See vv.2-3; cf. v.1c with Rev. 20:12,15; 21:27)

And, concerning the events associated with the Lord's second coming, the apostle Paul declares:

1 Thessalonians 4:16

⁽¹⁶⁾ For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: (See vv.13-18)

In the Bible, only Michael is specifically termed an archangel. Therefore, it must be assumed that, in the above passage, the apostle Paul is referring to this particular holy celestial being.

However, not even God's mighty and glorious archangel, Michael, would presume to accuse the chief of evil angels; namely, Satan. Thus, Jude says:

Jude 1:9

⁽⁹⁾ Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. (See vv.8,10; cf. 2 Pet. 2:10-11; cf. also Zech. 3:2)

Again, concerning the heavenly war in which the archangel Michael overcomes Satan and the demons, God's Word says:

Revelation 12:7-9

⁽⁷⁾ And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, ⁽⁸⁾ And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. ⁽⁹⁾ And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. (See vv.1-17)

Michael Protects God's Church

Apparently, then, God has appointed the archangel Michael to a position of great responsibility and honour. Michael's duties before God include the care and defence of God's redeemed people against the spiritual forces of evil; i.e., against Satan and his evil representatives throughout the heavenly and earthly realms. Left to their own devices, the evil spirits (or fallen angels) are capable of exercising a powerful, baneful, and delusive influence over the world, and over individual world rulers and governments. By the interposition of God's mighty and glorious holy angels, however, the satanic or demonic spirits are prevented from harming the church of God. Likewise, these mighty holy angels prevent these evil beings from inflicting harm on any of the individual believers who comprise this universal church of God. These believers are precious in God's sight since they have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

The Angel Gabriel

In the Bible, Gabriel is always designated simply as an angel, or an angel of the Lord. (Luke 1:11) Like Michael, however, Gabriel may be an archangel since he is one of the seven angels who stand in the presence of God. (Luke 1:19; Rev. 8:2) The name *Gabriel* may mean 'mighty man of God'.

The prayers of God's redeemed people are heard immediately, and answered according to the divine will and purposes of Almighty God. As can be seen from the following passage, the angel Gabriel was actively and powerfully involved in responding to the answer of Daniel's prayer to the LORD his God. Thus, Daniel says:

Daniel 9:21-23

⁽²¹⁾ Yea, while I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. ⁽²²⁾ And he informed *me*, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. ⁽²³⁾ At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show *thee*; for thou *art* greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision. (See vv.20-27)

On this occasion, the LORD had sent his celestial servant Gabriel to reveal to Daniel things that were yet to come. (God's revealed will for his people at the present time is recorded in the Bible. The Holy Spirit is the one designated by the Lord Jesus to interpret the truths of the Bible to his own people.)

Again, the Holy Scriptures designate the angel Gabriel as the one who stands in the presence of God (Luke 1:19). That is, Gabriel waits on God and serves him as a highly privileged member of the heavenly court or council.

The angel Gabriel was the holy messenger whom God sent to announce the conception and birth of John the Baptist. While the priest Zechariah was on duty at the temple, the angel Gabriel appeared to him. This mighty celestial messenger of God assured the trembling Zechariah that his prayer, and the prayer of his wife Elizabeth regarding a child, had been heard by God in heaven. Gabriel revealed to the aged priest of God that he and his wife were about to be greatly blessed of the Lord by bringing a son into the world. This child would grow up to become great in the eyes of the Lord; for he was to be God's appointed servant, John the Baptist.

At this advanced stage in his life and in the life of his wife, however, Zechariah entertained serious doubts about them having a child. The priest sinned against the Lord by doubting God's word and promise, as made known to him by the holy angel Gabriel. Thus, God's Word says:

Luke 1:18-20

⁽¹⁸⁾ And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man and my wife well stricken in years.

⁽¹⁹⁾ And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings. ⁽²⁰⁾ And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season. (See vv.5-25)

Similarly, Gabriel was the one who announced to the virgin Mary, and later to Joseph, the coming of the Son of God into the world. Again, Gabriel told this young couple that God's Son, Jesus, would be born of Mary while she was still a virgin. Jesus was to be conceived by immediate divine intervention, and born as the Holy One of God. Thus, God's Word says:

Luke 1:26-28

⁽²⁶⁾ And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, ⁽²⁷⁾ To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. ⁽²⁸⁾ And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, *thou that art* highly favoured, the Lord *is* with thee: blessed *art* thou among women. (See vv.29-38)

Mary was highly esteemed and greatly privileged by God, in that she—of all women—was specially chosen to bring his Son into the world. Nevertheless, after Jesus was born, those who came to pay their respects fell down and worshipped Mary's child; the holy Son of God. (Matt. 2:11)

Cherubim

Apart from angels and archangels, another class of angelic beings is the cherubim. The singular form of this noun is *cherub*. The plural is either *cherubs* or *cherubim* (not 'cherubims' as incorrectly rendered by the KJV).

As creatures who are mighty in power and magnificent in glory, the cherubim give some indication of the inexpressible splendour associated with the worship of God in heaven. These mighty cherubim stand at the throne of God and of the Lamb, praising and worshipping the living Triune God, and exalting his glorious and holy name.

In the prophecy of Ezekiel, the majestic and glorious cherubim are distinguished from other forms of angelic beings as having 'four faces and four wings.' Forming, as it does, part of Ezekiel's vision, however, these descriptive expressions should probably be understood symbolically. Perhaps such expressions are intended to represent something of the majesty, power and glory associated with those holy beings who stand in the presence of God, and who worship and serve him continually.

Guardian Cherubim in the Garden of Eden

After the fall of mankind and his expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the LORD God placed mighty cherubim at the entrance to the Garden to guard the way to the tree of life. Thus, the Scripture says:

Genesis 3:24

⁽²⁴⁾ So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. (See vv.1-23)

Never again would humankind be privileged to access the tree of eternal life. By his fall into sin, he had forfeited this inestimable privilege. Only by the mercy and redeeming love of God, would forgiveness of sin and eternal life be extended to men and women. This time, however, these gifts would come as a gift of God's grace and in accordance with his own sovereign will and pleasure; not as a result of man's righteousness, merit or worthiness.

Cherubim Symbolise God's Majestic Glory

In Ezekiel chapter 1, the cherubim are portrayed in vividly symbolic terms. Again, in this chapter (and elsewhere), these glorious celestial spirits are referred to rather mundanely as 'beasts' or 'living creatures'. However, in chapter 10 of Ezekiel, it is evident that the creatures referred to are the class of majestic holy angels known as *cherubim*. Together with the seraphim, these illustrious angelic spirits surround the throne of God. They act as guardians of God's throne and they serve and worship the God of all creation.

The cherubim are represented as providing mobility for the majestic throne of God; and God's throne is sometimes symbolised as a wheeled chariot-throne, as in Ezekiel's vision. Perhaps these symbols are intended to portray to us something of God's omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent rule over all creation. Just as the wheeled chariot-throne 'moves' at incredible speed in any direction, so God's sov-

ereign rule extends to the ends of creation. Throughout the entire universe, nothing is out of his sight or out of his mind.

Now, we will consider the description given of the cherubim in Ezekiel chapter 1.

The Glorious Appearance of the Cherubim

The glorious appearance of the cherubim—mirroring the infinitely greater glory of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit whom they serve—is illustrated by the following passages from the prophet Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 1:4-9

⁽⁴⁾ And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire enfolding itself, and a brightness *was* about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire. ⁽⁵⁾ Also out of the midst thereof *came* the likeness of four living creatures. And this *was* their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. ⁽⁶⁾ And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. ⁽⁷⁾ And their feet *were* straight feet; and the sole of their feet *was* like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. ⁽⁸⁾ And *they had* the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. ⁽⁹⁾ Their wings *were* joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward.

In his vision by the Kebar River, the prophet Ezekiel sees four mighty exalted living creatures. The appearance of flaming fire, flashes of lightning, and an aura of brilliant light surround these holy and majestic creatures. Ezekiel observes that the form of these mighty beings bore some resemblance to men. However, each of these exalted spirits had four faces and four wings, with human hands beneath their wings. The feet of these awesome and fiery living creatures gleamed like highly polished brass or bronze.

Ezekiel continues to describe his vision. From verse 12, the passage reads:

Ezekiel 1:12-13

⁽¹²⁾ And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; *and* they turned not when they went. ⁽¹³⁾ As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance *was* like burning coals of fire, *and* like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. (See vv.10-14)

These expressions make it clear that these cherubim are magnificent in power and glory. (The fire and the lightning perhaps denotes the absolute purity associated with the LORD God himself, and with those who stand in his holy presence.) The power and glory of these mighty cherubim, however, is as nothing compared with the power and glory of the Almighty God whom these created beings serve and worship. These mighty spirit beings depend wholly on God at all times for their very existence.

Cherubim Surround the LORD's Heavenly Throne

The exceeding greatness of the One who sits on the throne, far excels the glories of those who surround him. Thus, the prophet Ezekiel continues:

Ezekiel 1:22-28

⁽²²⁾ And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature *was* as the colour of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above. ⁽²³⁾ And under the firmament *were* their wings straight, the one toward the other: every one had two, which covered on this side, and every one had two, which covered on that side, their bodies. ⁽²⁴⁾ And when they went, I

heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of a host: when they stood, they let down their wings.

⁽²⁵⁾ And there was a voice from the firmament that *was* over their heads, when they stood, *and* had let down their wings. ⁽²⁶⁾ And above the firmament that *was* over their heads *was* the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne *was* the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. ⁽²⁷⁾ And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. ⁽²⁸⁾ As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so *was* the appearance of the brightness round about. This *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw *it*, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spoke. (See vv.15-24)

No matter how holy or highly exalted, no created being can ever compare in splendour with the transcendent glory of the LORD God Almighty. The LORD's resplendent outward glory emanates from the glory of his inward essence and character or attributes. The glory of the LORD is the sum of all his divine perfections. It is the essential qualities of his Being as perfect, uncreated and eternal Spirit. It is the infinite nature of all his attributes.

The glory of the cherubim and other angelic spirits, however, is the glory of those spirits whom God has *created* to honour, serve and worship him. The glory of angelic beings is the exalted, but finite, qualities or characteristics with which God has endowed them, according to his own sovereign will and pleasure. God was pleased to bestow such honour upon these ministering spirits, in order that they might exalt and magnify his matchless name by obeying his will and accomplishing his purposes.

Cherubim Move Like Lightning

Like other angelic spirit beings, cherubim can move from one part of space to another at almost unimaginable speed. This immense speed is perhaps many times the speed of light. Since they do not possess bodies of flesh and blood, angelic beings are not subject to the same limitations of time and space as are imposed upon known material objects. For this and like reasons, their transit through space can be undertaken with extreme rapidity. Thus, concerning the living creatures or cherubim, God's Word says:

Ezekiel 1:14

⁽¹⁴⁾ And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.

Many light years would be required to travel to distant points within this galaxy. Since God's throne in heaven lies beyond the most distant galaxy, and since the angels of God can travel from that point to the realms of earth in a relatively short space of time, this gives us some idea of the immense speeds which these glorious spirits must be capable of; or, at least, of their ability to transport themselves through the vast realms of space in a manner unknown to us.

The Four Faces of the Cherubim

Each cherub is described as having four faces. Thus, the prophet Ezekiel says:

Ezekiel 1:10-11a

⁽¹⁰⁾ As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left

side; they four also had the face of an eagle. ^(11a) Thus *were* their faces...
(Cf. Ezek. 10:14)

Man, lion, ox, eagle, are the four facial aspects of the cherubim as seen by Ezekiel in his vision. (But compare this passage with Ezekiel chapter 10, verse 14.) Different interpretations have been offered by a variety of different commentators to explain each of these aspects. It must be remembered, however, that symbolic language is notoriously difficult to interpret correctly.

The Four Wings of the Cherubim

Concerning the wings of these glorious angelic creatures, Ezekiel says:

Ezekiel 1:11b

^(11b) ...and their wings *were* stretched upward; two *wings* of every one *were* joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. (See vv.10-14)

In other parts of God's Word, both seraphim and cherubim are described as having wings, thereby implying bodily parts. (Isa. 6:2) Once more, however, this may be a symbolic representation. It must be borne in mind constantly that angels are spirits. As a rule, therefore, they do not possess bodily and material features. On specific occasions, however, they may assume material or physical-like features.

Apart from seraphim and cherubim, no other order of angels is expressly described as being equipped with wings or other bodily parts. In Daniel chapter 9 verse 21, the reference to the swift 'flying' of the angel Gabriel is almost the only one of its kind. In all other cases involving Gabriel or any other angel (apart from cherubim or seraphim) no mention is made of them having wings. This glaring omission is particularly noticeable on the part of those eyewitnesses who were present at the tomb of the risen Lord Jesus, and at his ascension. On both of these occasions, the witnesses described the angels in detail but made no mention of them having wings.

In his vision, the prophet Ezekiel sees the glory of the LORD about to depart from his holy temple. The departure of the LORD's glorious presence is immediately followed by God's judgment upon the city of Jerusalem. This judgment is represented symbolically by the outpouring of coals of fire upon a sinful and rebellious people. Thus, Ezekiel says:

Ezekiel 10:1-5

⁽¹⁾ Then I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubims there appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne. ⁽²⁾ And he spoke unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, *even* under the cherub, and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubims, and scatter *them* over the city. And he went in in my sight.

⁽³⁾ Now the cherubims stood on the right side of the house, when the man went in; and the cloud filled the inner court. ⁽⁴⁾ Then the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub, *and stood* over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the LORD's glory. ⁽⁵⁾ And the sound of the cherubims' wings was heard *even* to the outer court, as the voice of the Almighty God when he speaketh. (See vv.6-8)

In the following verses, Ezekiel further describes the symbolic appearance of the cherubim:

Ezekiel 10:12

⁽¹²⁾ And their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, *were* full of eyes round about, *even* the wheels that they four had.

Ezekiel 10:14

⁽¹⁴⁾ And every one had four faces: the first face *was* the face of a cherub, and the second face *was* the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.

Ezekiel 10:20-22

⁽²⁰⁾ This *is* the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Chebar; and I knew that they *were* the cherubims. ⁽²¹⁾ Every one had four faces apiece, and every one four wings; and the likeness of the hands of a man *was* under their wings. ⁽²²⁾ And the likeness of their faces *was* the same faces which I saw by the river of Chebar, their appearances and themselves: they went every one straight forward. (See vv.9-19)

Here, in Ezekiel chapter 10, the prophet identifies the glorious living creatures, which he had described in chapter 1, as cherubim. (Ezek. 10:15,20) Each of these mighty cherubim had four wings (in addition to their four faces). Their wings were completely full of 'eyes' (v.12). Perhaps, to our human minds, the wings are intended to symbolise swiftness of flight in the service of God, and the eyes to represent the all-seeing nature of God.

This, then, is but a brief and very inadequate glimpse of these glorious living creatures. However, we must never become so pre-occupied with the power and majesty of God's *creation* as to be side-tracked from adoring and worshipping God the *Creator* who made these beings to serve and worship him.

Guardian Cherubim

Apart from the two cherubs whom the LORD God placed in the Garden of Eden to block the way to the tree of life, we know very little about the cherubim in their capacity as guardians. However, the guardian role of the cherubim is alluded to in Ezekiel's prophecy concerning the king of Tyre. In this prophecy, the king of Tyre is likened to one of the guardian cherubs who rebelled against the LORD, and whom God expelled from his place of privilege, glory and honour. Thus, concerning the king of Tyre, the Scripture says:

Ezekiel 28:14-16

⁽¹⁴⁾ Thou *art* the anointed cherub that covereth [NIV, *guardian cherub*]; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Thou *wast* perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.

⁽¹⁶⁾ By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub [NIV, *guardian cherub*], from the midst of the stones of fire. (See vv.11-19)

This prophecy was pronounced against an earthly ruler; namely, the king of Tyre. It does not refer directly to the fall of Satan or to the fall of any other angelic being—although there may be an allusion to Satan's fall. The prophet is simply drawing a poetic parallel between the glories of the guardian cherub among the 'fiery stones'—i.e., in the majestic heavenly presence of God—and the glories of the king of Tyre before his judgment and fall.

However, from this passage of God's Word, it is evident that guardian or covering cherubim stand in the immediate and glorious presence of Almighty God. As we shall see shortly, these living cherubim in heaven were represented on earth by the two carved cherubim that 'guarded' and overshadowed the

mercy seat or atonement cover in the tabernacle or temple. The mercy seat represented the throne of God on earth. This was the place where God's glorious presence was manifested on earth when he appeared to the high priest, who—once every year, on the Day of Atonement—sprinkled the shed blood before and upon the mercy seat on behalf of the people.

From Ezekiel's prophecy, it is evident too, that, although created righteous and holy, the cherubim (like other angelic beings) were originally capable of sinning and rebelling against God. It is therefore possible that at least some of the fallen angels (or demons) may have been cherubim, although this is nowhere expressly stated in the Word of God.

Two Golden Cherubim Overshadowed the Mercy Seat

In God's appointed dwelling place on earth, his glorious heavenly throne was typified by the mercy seat. The mercy seat, which formed the top covering of the ark of the covenant, was composed of pure gold. The ark, including the mercy seat or atonement cover, was situated in the holy of holies; i.e., the most holy place within the tabernacle or temple of God. Overshadowing the pure gold mercy seat with their outstretched wings, were the figures of two hammered gold cherubim. Carved representations of the cherubim were also to be found incorporated into the tabernacle or temple furnishings.

Describing this scene, the LORD said:

Exodus 25:17-20

⁽¹⁷⁾ And thou shalt make a mercy seat *of* pure gold: two cubits and a half *shall* be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof. ⁽¹⁸⁾ And thou shalt make two cherubims *of* gold, *of* beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat. ⁽¹⁹⁾ And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end: *even* of the mercy seat shall ye make the cherubims on the two ends thereof. ⁽²⁰⁾ And the cherubims shall stretch forth *their* wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces *shall look* one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be. (See vv.10-22; see also 1 Kings 6:23-35; 8:6-7)

During the days of Samuel the prophet, Israel removed the ark of the covenant from God's appointed dwelling place at Shiloh and carried it into the midst of their war camp. However, on being attacked by the Philistines, the ark of God was captured and taken away by these foreign invaders.

Concerning the fact that the LORD of hosts was represented as dwelling between the cherubim, it is written in God's Word:

1 Samuel 4:4a

^(4a) So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth *between* the cherubims... (See vv.1-11; see also 2 Sam. 6:2)

Again, concerning King Hezekiah, it is written:

2 Kings 19:15

⁽¹⁵⁾ And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O LORD God of Israel, which dwellest *between* the cherubims, thou art the God, *even* thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth. (See vv.14-19; see also Ps. 80:1; 99:1)

From such Scripture passages as these, it is evident that God's glory in heaven shines forth from between the cherubim. From this throne of glory, God reigns supreme over heaven and earth. His ministering spirits—cherubim, seraphim and all other holy angelic creatures—worship before the glorious throne of God and the Lamb.

Two-Faced Cherubim

Normally, cherubim are depicted as having four aspects or faces. However, in the vision of Ezekiel's temple, the prophet portrays the carved cherubim within this sanctuary as having only two faces. (See v.18 below.) Thus, Ezekiel says:

Ezekiel 41:17-20

⁽¹⁷⁾ To that above the door, even unto the inner house, and without, and by all the wall round about within and without, by measure. ⁽¹⁸⁾ And *it was made* with cherubims and palm trees, so that a palm tree *was* between a cherub and a cherub; and *every cherub had **two faces***; ⁽¹⁹⁾ So that the face of a man was toward the palm tree on the one side, and the face of a young lion toward the palm tree on the other side: *it was made* through all the house round about. ⁽²⁰⁾ From the ground unto above the door *were* cherubims and palm trees made, and *on* the wall of the temple. (Bold emphasis added; see vv.15-26; cf. 1 Kings 6:23-35)

The fact that these particular carved cherubim were depicted as having only two faces may simply reflect the limitations of three-dimensional carvings on the two-dimensional walls of the sanctuary. This limitation may have necessitated the representation of only two of the four faces symbolically associated with the cherubim. Again, Ezekiel's temple with all its decorations and furnishings was seen in a vision. Unlike the tabernacle in the desert, and unlike Solomon's temple and Herod's temple, Ezekiel's temple was never actually constructed.

The cherubim and palm trees adorning the sanctuary may have served as a reminder of the Garden of Eden. In this earthly paradise, man had once walked in close communion with God. By his sin, however, man had alienated himself from God, and the LORD God had expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden. To prevent their subsequent return to Eden, with the possibility of their reaching the tree of life, the LORD God placed two mighty cherubim at the east side of the Garden. These glorious cherubim had stood with flaming swords in their hands, guarding the way to the tree of life. (Gen. 3:22-24)

Since the fall of man, it is only by means of a substitutionary atonement that he can be reconciled to God, and, by God's sovereign grace, re-admitted to abiding and close fellowship with his Creator.

(Under the Old Testament administration, atonement was effected by the blood of the atoning sacrifices that God had prescribed. Once every year, on the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), this blood was sprinkled by the Jewish high priest on and before the mercy seat. This mercy seat or atonement cover represented the throne of God, or the place where God manifested his glory on earth. Again, it was the place where God met with the representative of his people; i.e., the high priest. The mercy seat or throne covered the ark of the covenant; and above the mercy seat, and overshadowing it, stood the magnificent figures of two golden cherubim. Under the present administration, Jesus, our Great High Priest, has made a once-for-all atoning sacrifice for the sins of his people. Now, on the actual 'throne' of God in heaven, he intercedes with the Father on our behalf. Admission to the paradise of God—i.e., to God's heavenly kingdom—is by grace through faith in the person and work of Christ.)

In reading the description of the glorious cherubim and other celestial creatures, it should be borne in mind continually that certain passages of God's Word, especially those connected with visions, may contain figurative or symbolical elements. For this reason, we should exercise a degree of caution in interpreting the description given of both cherubim and seraphim—unless these descriptions can be verified as literal and accurate from the ordinary narrative and didactic passages of God's Word.

Seraphim

Another class of glorious heavenly beings is the seraphim. The singular of this noun is 'seraph'. The plural form is either 'seraphs' or 'seraphim' (not 'seraphims' as incorrectly rendered by the KJV).

Apparently, the root of the term 'seraph' means 'to burn'. Perhaps the term 'seraph' alludes to the burning or intrinsic and absolute purity, righteousness and holiness of Almighty God. It may also allude to

the relative burning purity, righteousness and holiness of the mighty celestial creatures who surround God's throne, and who worship and serve their Creator.

In the Bible, seraphim are mentioned as a distinct angelic class only in the prophecy of Isaiah. In this book, the seraphim are distinguished from the cherubim by their six wings (whereas cherubim have only four wings). The six-winged 'beasts' or living creatures mentioned in Revelation chapter 4, however, may be another reference to the glorious seraphim. Some theologians, however, (e.g., Dabney), believed that the seraphim and cherubim might be the same class of angels.³

The prophet Isaiah describes a vision that he saw of the LORD in his heavenly temple. In this vision, the LORD was surrounded by the mighty seraphim. Thus, in chapter 6 of his prophecy, Isaiah says:

Isaiah 6:1-7

(¹) In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. (²) Above it stood the seraphims: **each one had six wings** with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. (³) And one cried unto another, and said,

Holy, holy, holy, *is* the LORD of hosts: the whole earth *is* full of his glory.

(⁴) And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

(⁵) Then said I, Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

(⁶) Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, *which* he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: (⁷) And he laid *it* upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. (bold emphasis added; see vv.8-13)

Standing above the throne of God in heaven were the six-winged seraphim. In the presence of the Almighty and All-Holy God, these illustrious seraphim veiled their faces and covered their feet. As they hovered above God's celestial throne, the seraphim continually praised, worshipped and adored the LORD God Almighty, acknowledging that the whole earth was full of his glory.

Living Creatures (or 'Beasts') May be Seraphim

We turn our attention now to the New Testament, and to a parallel passage in the book of Revelation: In his vision of God seated on his glorious heavenly throne, the apostle John tells us:

Revelation 4:6-11

(⁶) And before the throne *there was* a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, *were* four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

(⁷) And the first beast *was* like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast *was* like a flying eagle.

(⁸) And the four beasts had **each of them six wings** about *him*; and *they were* full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying,

³ R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, p.268.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

⁽⁹⁾ And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth forever and ever, ⁽¹⁰⁾ The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

⁽¹¹⁾ Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. (Bold emphasis added; see vv. 1-5)

This passage expands on the information given us by the prophet Isaiah concerning the heavenly throne of God. It provides us with greater detail on these glorious angelic creatures who attend God's throne, and who continually praise, worship and adore the LORD God Almighty. In this passage from Revelation chapter 4, the angelic beings surrounding the throne of God are termed 'living creatures' (KJV, 'beasts'; Gk., ζῶον, *living things* or *living beings*, (resembling a 'composite animal or creature')).

It may also be noted from this passage that the faces of these living creatures resemble that of the cherubim. However, from the fact that the above-mentioned living creatures have six wings, it would appear that they are seraphim, as in Isaiah's vision (Isaiah chapter 6). Cherubim, as we have noted previously, appear to have only four wings.

Four Seraphim around God's Throne

Among other glorious celestial beings, four majestic living creatures—probably seraphim—stand around the throne of God in heaven.

In his vision of God's throne in heaven, the apostle John observed that no one was found worthy to open the scroll in the hand of him who sat upon the throne. John wept because no one was able to open this scroll. Then, one of the elders pointed out to the grieving apostle the one who had conquered—the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David.

Thus, John says

Revelation 5:6-8

⁽⁶⁾ And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

⁽⁷⁾ And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. ⁽⁸⁾ And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four *and* twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. (See vv.1-10)

In the glorious and majestic presence of the spotless, sinless Son of God—the Lamb slain from before the creation of the world—the four seraphim ('beasts' or living creatures) fall down in homage, adoration, praise and divine worship. Although holy and pure themselves, the exalted heavenly seraphim are *created* beings. As such, they, together with every other *created* being, must fall down in worship before the one whose perfections include *uncreated* or eternal Being, infinite holiness and absolute purity.

It is no wonder that these celestial beings are compelled to worship the Lamb. Unlike them, and concerning his deity, the Son of God is uncreated and infinitely pure and holy. God's Son, therefore, is worthy of all adoration, praise and worship because of his eternal Being, his infinite merits, and his perfect work.

Seraphim Worship the Lamb

However, it is not only the mighty seraphim who worship and praise the Lamb of God. These celestial spirits are joined in their worship by myriads of other mighty angels who surround the throne of God and of the Lamb, and who obey God's will at all time. Together with all creation, these glorious heavenly beings unite in a chorus of endless adoration to the God of creation, providence and redemption, and to his eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The glorified and eternal Son of God is the one who secured the redemption into which even the holy angels desire to look. (1 Pet. 1:12)

Concerning this worshipping angelic host, the apostle John, in Revelation chapter 5, relates:

Revelation 5:11-14

⁽¹¹⁾ And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; ⁽¹²⁾ Saying with a loud voice,

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

⁽¹³⁾ And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever.

⁽¹⁴⁾ And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four *and* twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth forever and ever.

From this passage, it is abundantly clear that the glorious seraphim, together with every other creature in heaven and on earth, worship (or will worship) the Lamb of God. To the Lamb is all glory, honour, praise and adoration due—never to the angels. To the Lamb must our prayers and petitions be addressed—never to the angels. Angels are created beings. As such, they must never be petitioned or worshipped. Rather, we must address our petitions, our worship and our praise, together with the angels, to the one who sits upon the throne: namely, to God Almighty; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The living creatures or seraphim are mentioned once more in Revelation chapter 6, where the exalted and glorified Lord Jesus alone is found worthy to open the seven-sealed scroll. Thus, the apostle John tells us:

Revelation 6:1

⁽¹⁾ And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. (See also vv.3,5,7)

The voice of the majestic and glorious seraphim resonated like thunder across the heavens, commanding John's attention. Like other angelic creatures, the seraphim are ministering spirits or servants of God. In this instance, one of these majestic living creatures is serving the Lord God Almighty by directing John's attention to the Lamb upon the throne, as he opens the seven-sealed scroll.

Part 4

The 'Sons of God'

The expression, 'sons of God', is used in different ways. Sometimes, this expression denotes the angels of God. At other times, it denotes the redeemed children of God (i.e., the sons and daughters of God by regeneration and adoption). Yet again, the expression 'sons of God' may be used to denote the line of descendants deriving from godly Seth, in contrast to the wicked descendants of Cain. (Cf. Gen. 6:2,4)

The use of the expression 'sons of God' as meaning the children of God has been dealt with elsewhere.⁴ The use of the expression as an angelic designation will be considered here very briefly.

In the book of Job, it is recorded:

Job 1:6

⁽⁶⁾ Now there was a day when the sons of God [NIV, *angels*] came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. (See vv.7-22)

In the second chapter of Job, it is written:

Job 2:1

⁽¹⁾ Again there was a day when the sons of God [NIV, *angels*] came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. (See vv.2-10)

Again, in chapter 38 of the same book, the LORD declares:

Job 38:4,7

⁽⁴⁾ Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding... ⁽⁷⁾ When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God [NIV, *angels*] shouted for joy?

In the King James Version above, the expression 'sons of God' can refer only to the angels (as in the New International Version). The last passage above refers to a point in time preceding the creation of man. Therefore, in this instance, the 'sons of God' is not a reference to the children of God, but rather to God's celestial servants, the holy angels.

In reference to angels, the expression 'sons of God' is used only occasionally in the Bible. In most other cases, this, or the related expressions, 'children of God'; 'my sons and daughters', etc., refers to the redeemed and holy people of God.

The Council of Heaven

'The council of heaven' (or 'the council of the LORD') is a term that is used to denote the court or council of mighty and holy heavenly beings who stand before the throne of the LORD God Almighty. The book of Revelation intimates that there are seven angels or seven ministering spirits who stand in the presence of God—although, admittedly, this passage contains both literal and figurative expressions. (Rev. 8:2; cf. Zech. 6:5) Among these mighty holy angels is the angel Gabriel. According to the Gospel

⁴ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Adoption*, by Gordon Lyons.

of Luke, Gabriel is one who stands in the presence of God. (Luke 1:19) The archangel Michael probably also should be included as serving and worshipping in the immediate presence of God and of the Lamb.

In addition to the seven angels who wait before God's throne, the Bible tells us that there is a vast multitude of other holy angels, including cherubim and seraphim, who surround the throne of God and of the Lamb. Together, these exalted heavenly beings worship the one who sits upon the throne. Thus, the apostle John says:

Revelation 5:11

⁽¹¹⁾ And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; (See vv.6:14; cf. Dan. 7:10; Heb. 12:22)

God Rules in the Great Assembly

The Almighty and Triune God presides and rules over this vast assembly of angels in heaven. This angelic gathering constitutes God's heavenly council or court. Thus, God's prophet Micaiah said to Ahab, king of Israel:

1 Kings 22:19

⁽¹⁹⁾ And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. (See vv.1-28)

And again, the psalmist says:

Psalms 82:1

⁽¹⁾ A Psalm of Asaph.

God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods.
(See vv.2-8; cf. v.1b with v.6)

Angels Reverence God

Unlike human courts or councils, the council of heaven is not composed of equals over whom an elected or appointed representative presides. As noted above, the 'President' or Ruler of the heavenly council is the Triune God—the absolute sovereign of the universe. All other members of this majestic council (i.e., the holy angels around the throne) are *created* beings, and therefore vastly inferior, and subservient, to the divine, glorious and uncreated Trinity.

The Scriptures make it very plain that God is greatly feared—i.e., revered or held in holy awe—by the mighty angelic beings who comprise God's heavenly council. Thus, God's Word says:

Psalms 89:6-7

⁽⁶⁾ For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? *who* among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD?

⁽⁷⁾ God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints [NIV, *holy ones*], and to be had in reverence of all *them that are* about him. (See vv.5,8)

The holy angels recognise that the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is infinitely more awesome and glorious than they themselves. God alone, therefore—One God in three divine persons—is

to be honoured and revered. Among all the vast multitude of heavenly beings, he alone is to be worshipped, praised and glorified. He alone is divine. He alone is uncreated and eternal.

True and False Messengers

Those who stand in God's council are made very aware of God's will, plan and purposes for mankind; insofar as the Lord pleases to reveal his plan and purposes to created beings. This is especially true concerning God's revealed intentions for his own redeemed and holy people.

Only the holy angels are permitted to stand in the council of God. (Yet, even these holy beings have a limited knowledge of the mysteries of salvation (Eph. 3:9-11; 1 Pet. 1:12)).

In the following passage from God's Word, it is not the holy angels, but false or lying prophets to whom allusion is being made. Concerning these lying prophets, the LORD God declares:

Jeremiah 23:18

⁽¹⁸⁾ For who hath stood in the counsel of the LORD, and hath perceived and heard his word? who hath marked his word, and heard *it*?

Jeremiah 23:21-22

⁽²¹⁾ I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. ⁽²²⁾ But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings. (See vv.9-40)

The false messengers or lying prophets referred to in this passage had not stood in God's council. That is, they had not been privy to God's will, as it had been revealed, for example, in dreams, visions, or by angelic messengers, to the true prophets of God. Furthermore, these false and deceitful prophets had not been appointed to the prophetic office by God's Holy Spirit. On the contrary, these lying messengers were self-appointed men (vv.21,32). They were men without the Spirit of God.

Instead of proclaiming God's Word faithfully to the people—both the promises and the warnings of God—these false prophets had attempted to discredit the message of God's true prophet, Jeremiah, and to slander God's faithful servant. The false prophets had openly scorned the messages from God, and had publicly maligned God's true prophet. These deceitful preachers had been proclaiming gross lies to the people. Yet, while doing this, they had been giving the distinct impression that they had been speaking in the name of the LORD. (Jer. 23:25-40)

Lying Spirits Permitted by God

On another similar occasion, recorded in 1 Kings chapter 22, God's true prophet Micaiah brought this message to the evil king of Israel, King Ahab:

1 Kings 22:19-23

⁽¹⁹⁾ And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. ⁽²⁰⁾ And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner.

⁽²¹⁾ And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him.

⁽²²⁾ And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade *him*, and prevail also: go forth, and do so.

⁽²³⁾ Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee. (See vv.1-38)

From the above passage, it can be seen that nothing can be accomplished apart from God's eternal decree. Even the evil spirits, whom God permitted to act as lying spirits in the mouths of the false prophets, had to receive express permission from God. Thus, both the false prophets, and those who believed their messages, were enticed to believe a lie. The former acted under the delusion of the devil, and the latter allowed themselves to become deluded ⁵ by the messengers of Satan—the false prophets. Because they had wilfully, stubbornly and repeatedly refused to believe and love the truth—and had preferred distortions and lies—these people ultimately perished in their sinful ways.

God Sends a Powerful Delusion

These people had been deceived and deluded by the lying prophets because they had deliberately refused to hear God's true prophets, and to obey God's Word. Exactly the same principle applies concerning the man of sin. The man of sin, or the Antichrist or lawless one, will be the ultimate false and lying prophet. Millions of people will be deceived by his message, and vast multitudes will follow him. This will happen because they refuse to receive and love the truth. To this end, God's Word says:

2 Thessalonians 2:9-12

⁽⁹⁾ *Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, ⁽¹⁰⁾ And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. ⁽¹¹⁾ And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: ⁽¹²⁾ That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (See vv.1-15)

The Revealed Will of God

(The Whole Counsel of God)

In regard to church office and ministry, and to its office-bearers, those who stand in the council of the Lord are those whom God has appointed to, and equipped for, that office by the Holy Spirit. By their regular and prayerful communion with their Lord, and by their diligent study of his revealed Word, these true servants of the Lord learn God's ways and God's will. In the power of the Holy Spirit, these servants of God then impart God's Word—and God's Word alone—to the people. In discharging their spiritual duties and responsibilities before the Lord, these men faithfully, fearlessly and yet lovingly declare the whole counsel of God; i.e., the whole revealed will of God as it is disclosed to us in the Bible, and in the Bible alone.

God reveals something of his divine power and glory to all mankind through the natural creation, so that no one can rationally deny his existence. Those, therefore, who reject God's revelation of himself in the natural creation are without excuse.

The Bible is the sole *written* revelation of God's will and purpose for mankind. Everything necessary to faith and godliness is revealed within its pages. The Bible is also known as the revealed will of God, as distinct from the secret or undisclosed things of God. (Cf. Deut. 29:29)

⁵ *deluded: (or bewitched)*. This was the word the apostle Paul was to use centuries later when writing to the church at Galatia. Then, because they were in grave danger of being deceived and led astray by the false teachers, the apostle exclaims, 'Who has bewitched (or deluded) you...?' (Gal. 3:1) Those who are deluded by false teaching are likened to those who are placed under a bewitching spell—in this case, the spell of the devil, operating through his servants, the false prophets or false teachers. [G. Lyons]

God's spokesmen or ministers are under a solemn and sacred obligation to preach and teach this Word, and this Word alone. They are expressly forbidden to add anything to God's Word, the Bible, or to subtract anything from that Word. (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-19)

The Angel of the LORD

As intimated at the outset of this study, the phrase, '*the angel of the LORD*' may be used to refer to a particular mighty angel. Occasionally, however, it may refer to the *Angel of the Covenant*; i.e., the Son of God, and the Messianic Messenger of Malachi chapter 3 (verse 1).

In the following verse from the prophecy of Zechariah, it is evident that the 'Angel of the LORD' is an alternative expression for the LORD God himself (i.e., Yahweh). Thus, God's Word says:

Zechariah 12:8

⁽⁸⁾ In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David *shall be* as God, as the angel of the LORD before them. (See vv.1-14)

The Angel of the Covenant

The 'Angel of the LORD' (Yahweh), or the 'Angel of God' is a phrase often used to denote an appearing or manifestation of God to his people. When a person of the Godhead assumes visible form, this is known as a 'theophany.' Thus, concerning Abraham, the Scripture says:

Genesis 22:15-17

⁽¹⁵⁾ And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, ⁽¹⁶⁾ And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: ⁽¹⁷⁾ That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which *is* upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; (See vv.1-18)

From verse 15 above, it is evident that the 'angel of the LORD' refers to none other than the LORD God himself, as verse 16 makes clear.

Again, concerning Gideon, God's Word says:

Judges 6:12,22-23

⁽¹²⁾ And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD *is* with thee, thou mighty man of valour...

⁽²²⁾ And when Gideon perceived that he *was* an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face.

⁽²³⁾ And the LORD said unto him, Peace *be* unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. (See vv.1-24)

From these and many other similar passages, it is evident that the angel of the LORD is none less than the LORD God himself, as the immediate context indicates.

Often, it is said that these expressions refer to a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son of God. In the Gospel of John, the Lord Jesus refers to himself as the '*I am*' (e.g., John 8:58; see also v.59; cf. John 10:30-38). As his Jewish hearers clearly recognised, the expression, '*I am*', was one which—in Exodus 3:14-15—is used expressly and exclusively of the LORD God himself; i.e., Yahweh (transliterated, Je-

hovah). In view of this, it is certainly appropriate to understand the expression, ‘the Angel of the LORD’ as referring either to the Father, or to the Son—depending on the immediate context.⁶

Other similar phrases with the same meaning are, ‘Angel of God’ (Gen. 31:11), ‘Mine Angel’ or ‘My Angel’ (Exodus 32:34), ‘Angel of his Presence’ (Isa. 63:9), and ‘The Angel’ (Hosea 12:4).

The Commander of the LORD’s Armies

Sometimes, the angel of the LORD is designated as the captain or commander of the LORD’s armies. The LORD’s armies are the angelic heavenly host: i.e., the myriads of holy angels who act as ministering spirits of God; who guard the feet of the saints, and who defend God’s people from all harm.

Concerning the fall of Jericho, Joshua is reminded by the commander of the LORD’s armies that the victory would be the LORD’s—not the armies of Israel. Hence, the Scripture says:

Joshua 5:13-15

⁽¹³⁾ And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, *Art* thou for us, or for our adversaries?

⁽¹⁴⁾ And he said, Nay; but *as* captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant?

⁽¹⁵⁾ And the captain of the LORD 's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest *is* holy. And Joshua did so. (See Joshua 6:1-27)

When compared with Joshua chapter 6 verse 2, the above passage appears to indicate that this was not merely a mighty angel of God, but a divine Person who stood before Joshua, and before whom Joshua fell down to worship. Like Moses before him, Joshua was instructed to remove his sandals—for the place on which he was standing was holy ground (v.15; cf. Exodus 3:5).

The Majestic Servant of God

On another occasion, the prophet Daniel witnessed in a vision one of the LORD’s glorious heavenly messengers. Daniel describes this scene:

Daniel 10:5-6

⁽⁵⁾ Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins *were* girded with fine gold of Uphaz: ⁽⁶⁾ His body also *was* like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. (See vv.7-21)

According to some commentators, this majestic personage is understood to be the Son of God appearing to one of his people before his incarnation (a ‘Christophany’). According to others, however, Daniel’s description is thought to relate to one of God’s holy angels. If so, it cannot be the archangel Michael, for he is mentioned separately in verses 13 and 21 of the same chapter.

⁶ Compare R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 186-189

Chariots of Fire

The phrase, 'chariots of fire', is a phrase that sometimes is used to denote the glorious appearance of angelic heavenly beings in order to accomplish specific tasks. For example, the prophet Elisha witnessed what seemed to be 'chariots and horses of fire', as the holy and majestic angels of God appeared to escort his master Elijah home to heaven. Thus, the Scripture says:

2 Kings 2:11-12

⁽¹¹⁾ And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, *there appeared* a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. ⁽¹²⁾ And Elisha saw *it*, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. (See vv.1-18)

On another occasion, Israel was facing certain defeat at the hands of the Arameans when the enemy was suddenly confronted with chariots of fire. God's celestial army of holy angels had appeared in their majestic glory to put the enemy to flight, and to protect the people of God. Thus, it is written:

2 Kings 6:16-17

⁽¹⁶⁾ And he answered, Fear not: for they that *be* with us *are* more than they that *be* with them.

⁽¹⁷⁾ And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain *was* full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. (See vv.8-23)

Again, in a vision, the prophet Zechariah says:

Zechariah 6:1-5

⁽¹⁾ And I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came four chariots out from between two mountains; and the mountains *were* mountains of brass. ⁽²⁾ In the first chariot *were* red horses; and in the second chariot black horses; ⁽³⁾ And in the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot grizzled and bay horses. ⁽⁴⁾ Then I answered and said unto the angel that talked with me, What *are* these, my lord?

⁽⁵⁾ And the angel answered and said unto me, These *are* the four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth. (See vv.6-8)

In such contexts as these, the chariots or chariots of fire may be considered as symbolical representations of the mighty power of God's heavenly hosts; i.e., his holy angels or spirit messengers. These magnificent celestial spirits provide a signal manifestation of the majestic glory that surrounds the presence of Almighty God. A similar manifestation of God's power and glory—yet future—will be the appearing of the Lord Jesus, with his mighty angels, on the Day of Judgment. (Matt. 25:31)

Commenting on the significance of the *four* chariots, representing the *four* spirits of heaven, Thomas Moore said:

"...The number *four* has the same significance here as in the *four winds* of Daniel, the *four cherubs* of Ezekiel, the *four angels* at the *four corners* of the earth in the Apocalypse [Revelation], and the *four horns* and the *four artificers* of the second vision. Alluding to the

four points of the compass, it is the symbol of universality, a judgment that goes in every direction..."⁷ (Italics added)

⁷ T. V. Moore, *Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi*, p.173, [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979 reprint.]

Part 5

Work of Angels Distinct From, and Subordinate to, Work of the Trinity

From his glorious heavenly throne, the Lord God exercises his sovereign dominion over his entire creation. Surrounded by myriads of worshipping angels, God executes his eternal decrees in connection with his works of creation, providence and redemption.

Although constituting God's heavenly council, the angels took no part in establishing or formulating God's eternal decrees. This was a plan of the Godhead exclusively, and it was put into effect before God created the angels. The holy angels are God's heavenly messengers. In accordance with the will of God, some of these powerful celestial beings are dispatched from the heavenly realms to the earthly realms. The task of these glorious spirit messengers is to further God's purposes for the universe, to minister to the heirs of salvation, and to guard the feet of the saints.

The ministry and work of the holy angels should not be confused or confounded with the work of the Godhead or Holy Trinity. Nor should it be confused with the work of the individual Persons of the Godhead—particularly, the Holy Spirit, through whom God executes his eternal decrees. There is no real point of comparison between the work of the Holy Spirit (in effectual calling, regeneration, sanctification, glorification, etc.), and of the ministry of holy angels on behalf of believers.

Similarly, the preserving agency of angels concerning God's people should not be confused or equated with God's works of providence. In his providence, God preserves and protects his redeemed people with an almighty hand. The Lord may send his angels to accomplish certain aspects of this work: e.g., those aspects that concern our physical wellbeing. However, the Lord never entrusts wholly to angels the preservation or protection of our spiritual or eternal welfare. Our salvation (including our regeneration, sanctification and glorification) is in the hands of the Almighty and Sovereign God, and is exclusively the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Angels are Finite Creatures

Although angels are mighty and glorious messengers of God, they are nevertheless finite beings. The work they are called upon to perform, therefore, is subject to the limitations imposed upon them as finite creatures. Again, the work performed by angels is of an *indirect* nature; i.e., they are engaged in carrying out the purposes of God, but they are not involved in formulating God's eternal purposes. They cannot operate independently of God nor of God's express will and purposes, but only in response to God's explicit commands. The work of angels, therefore, is entirely subordinate to the work of the Godhead. The work of the Godhead—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is the work of the one and only uncreated, infinite and eternal Being. This work is *direct* in its nature and application.

Again, and most importantly, the persons of the Godhead are the objects of divine honours, praise and worship. None of the angels however—no matter how exalted—must ever be afforded divine honours or praise, nor must they be afforded any kind or degree of worship. *The Angel of the LORD* (i.e., the Lord God or the Lord Jesus himself in angelic form) is the only exception to this rule. Thus, in the book of Revelation, when the angel had revealed to the apostle John everything that the Lord Jesus wanted him to write down, the Scripture says concerning John:

Revelation 22:8-9

⁽⁸⁾ And I John saw these things, and heard *them*. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. ⁽⁹⁾ Then saith he unto me, See *thou do it* not: for I am thy fellow

servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God. (See vv.1-16; cf. Rev. 19:10)

Angels are Ministering Spirits

In the epistle to the Hebrews, we are reminded that, primarily, the angels are God's servants. They are messengers or ministering spirits. Thus, in demonstrating the vastly superior nature, office and ministry of God's Son to that of angels, the writer of Hebrews says:

Hebrews 1:6-7

⁽⁶⁾ And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith,

And let all the angels of God worship him. {*Deut. 32:43 LXX*}

⁽⁷⁾ And of the angels he saith,

Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. {*Psalms 104:4*} (See Heb. 1:1-13)

Again, in the same chapter, the writer says:

Hebrews 1:14

⁽¹⁴⁾ Are they [*angels*] not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? (See also Heb. 2:1-9)

Angels are celestial messengers whom God uses to minister to the heirs of salvation. Primarily, however, these mighty spirits minister before the throne of God, and they worship, praise and adore God and the Lamb.

Angels Minister to God

The holy angels, including seraphim and cherubim, are the servants of the living sovereign God. They are his heavenly attendants or 'guardians' of the throne. These angels minister constantly to the LORD God Almighty, and to his eternal Son; and they worship before God and the Lamb. In the days of his voluntary incarnation and humiliation, some of these glorious angels ministered to the Son of God during his temptation in the desert, and during his trials in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Concerning one period of Jesus' temptations, it is written:

Matthew 4:8-10

⁽⁸⁾ Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

⁽⁹⁾ And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. {*Deut. 6:13*} (See Matt. 4:1-7)

Then, having repelled the chief of fallen angels with the Word of God, the Scripture again says of Jesus:

Matthew 4:11

⁽¹¹⁾ Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

Toward the end of his earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus appealed earnestly to his heavenly Father concerning the sufferings that he was about to endure at Calvary. This anguish of Jesus' soul took place in the Garden of Gethsemane, on the sides of the Mount of Olives. Regarding this intense ordeal in the life of the Lord Jesus, and the subsequent ministry of angels, it is written:

Luke 22:41-43

⁽⁴¹⁾ And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, ⁽⁴²⁾ Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. ⁽⁴³⁾ And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. (See vv.39-46; cf. Matt. 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42)

There may have been other occasions, of course, when the angels of God ministered to the needs of the Lord Jesus, but these are not recorded for us in the Scriptures.

Angels Minister to God's People

In addition to their ministry associated with the service and worship of the Triune God, the holy angels may be considered as the stewards, or delegated administrators, of some of God's works of grace and providence throughout the world. This is particularly true concerning their responsibility toward the elect, and consequently, the church worldwide. To this end, therefore, the angels are sent forth to minister to those whom God has designated as his own, and who are the heirs of salvation and of eternal life. This applies to the elect even before they have been effectually called and regenerated—for God ensures that none of his elect will be hindered or prevented from being brought to repentance and faith in his Son.

As regards the church in general, and believers in particular, the ministry of these holy angels is largely unknown to us (apart from what is revealed about them in the Word of God). Again, of course, their ministry is unseen by us. As a rule, angels are invisible spirit beings. The only exception to this rule being those rare occasions in the Bible when some of God's holy angels have assumed human-like form in order to be seen by mankind.

Although invisible in their service, the ministry of angels toward God's people is nevertheless a very real and important ministry, as the Scriptures clearly indicate. Thus, in all the troubling and trying circumstances of life, God's redeemed people are given this solemn assurance:

Psalms 34:7

⁽⁷⁾ The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. (See vv.4-6)

Here, it may be observed that the phrase, the 'angel of the LORD' is used. This may indicate that the person intended in this verse is no less a person than the LORD God Almighty himself.

In the ninety-first Psalm, it is written:

Psalms 91:9-12

⁽⁹⁾ Because thou hast made the LORD, *which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation;*

⁽¹⁰⁾ There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

⁽¹¹⁾ For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

⁽¹²⁾ They shall bear thee up in *their* hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. (See vv.1-16)

Again, as we have seen previously in Hebrews chapter 1, it is written concerning the ministry of God's holy angels:

Hebrews 1:14 NIV

⁽¹⁴⁾ Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (See vv.4-13; see also Heb. 2:1-9)

When we are honouring the Lord in our lives, and when we are living with a due fear of God in our hearts, then God has promised us that, in times of trial, he will surely deliver us. The Lord may effect such deliverance by his works of grace or providence, or by the agency of his holy angels. Either way, the Lord promises most solemnly to preserve and protect his redeemed and holy people.

This does not mean that God will exempt us from the ordinary trials and difficulties of life. Nor does it mean that we will not be exposed at times to potentially hazardous, dangerous or even life threatening situations. Rather, as with the three young friends of Daniel, God's promise means that he will deliver us *through* the fiery trial, although not necessarily *out of* it. (See Dan. 3:24-28; cf. Job 1:8-22) It is a cast iron guarantee that, even if we should be called upon to sacrifice our physical lives for the sake of Christ, we will never forfeit our eternal salvation or our inheritance in glory.

Death is Not the End of Life

Physical death (the death and dissolution of the body) is not the end of life. It is the temporary separation of body and soul. For the redeemed child of God, death means immediate entrance into the presence of God in heaven.

It must be remembered that God's concern is ultimately for our spiritual and eternal welfare (although, of course, he also makes provision for the physical and material needs of our bodies as presently constituted). Under certain circumstances, the Lord may deem it wise and good to ordain or permit the physical death of his beloved child in order to achieve his higher and eternal objectives in the life of that person. (Isa. 57:1; cf. Ps. 116:15) For example, when the evil woman, Jezebel, threatened Elijah's life, this faithful prophet of God fled to a place of safety. Later, however, during a period of intense discouragement, despair and apprehension, the prophet pleaded with the LORD to let him die. Thus, concerning this traumatic event in Elijah's life, the Scripture says:

1 Kings 19:3-4

⁽³⁾ And when he saw *that*, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which *belongeth* to Judah, and left his servant there. ⁽⁴⁾ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I *am* not better than my fathers [NIV, *ancestors*]. (See vv.1-2)

Having faithfully represented God's holy name, and believing that he was now the only person left who had remained true to God, Elijah felt spiritually, mentally, physically and emotionally exhausted. Reflecting this state of total exhaustion, the Scripture says of Elijah, *Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep* (v.5).

It was at this point of extreme crisis and near-despair in Elijah's life that the LORD sent one of his mighty angels to minister to the needs of his exhausted but faithful servant. As the Scripture says:

1 Kings 19:5-8

⁽⁵⁾ And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise *and* eat. ⁽⁶⁾ And he looked, and, behold, *there was* a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again.

⁽⁷⁾ And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise *and* eat; because the journey *is* too great for thee. ⁽⁸⁾ And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God. (See vv.9-21)

Some time after this incident, the LORD was to call his faithful servant Elijah into the glory of his immediate presence. Elijah was escorted to that celestial home by multitudes of glorious heavenly beings ('the chariots and horses of fire'). However, before releasing Elijah from his duties and responsibilities, a successor (Elisha) had to be appointed to the prophetic office.

Guardian Angels

In both the Old and the New Testaments, reference is made to the protecting and preserving care of God's people by angelic agency. Sometimes, some of these angels are thought of as personal 'guardian angels'. Certainly, the Old Testament teaches that God gave the archangel Michael (also known as a 'prince') specific responsibility for the protection of Israel. In this sense, angels may be considered as protectors or guardians of certain nations or peoples. However, the Bible does not expressly assert that every individual believer has his or her own particular guardian angel.

Another notion, where some of the Lord's followers believed that a (guardian) angel or spirit was associated with the apostle Peter, is inconclusive. This may have been a sincerely held, but possibly mistaken, perception of angelic ministry on the part of these early disciples. While praying for the imprisoned Peter's release in the home of John Mark's mother, these disciples had learned that Peter's voice had been heard and recognised at the door of the house. Believing, however, that Peter was still being held securely in prison, the disciples had concluded that the maid, who heard the apostle's voice at the door, must in fact have heard the voice of his angel (or spirit). (Acts 12:12-17)

From the above Scriptures, some people have assumed that each believer has a personal 'guardian' angel. Whether this is so or not, however, cannot be established from these particular passages.

Angels Preserve and Protect God's Own People

Angels may be regarded as mighty celestial beings whom God has appointed to preserve and protect his redeemed and holy people. This is especially true in relation to the spiritual forces of evil; i.e., Satan and the demons. The fallen angels—who constitute the spiritual forces of evil—are responsible for exerting a malevolent influence on the minds and in the lives of ungodly and unregenerate men and women. By thus exerting their powerful and evil influences upon these ungodly people, Satan and the demons cause them, directly and indirectly, to oppose and malign the true church and people of God. (Eph. 2:2; 2 Tim. 2:26; 1 John 5:19; see also John 8:44)

This is one of the ways in which the holy angels minister to God's redeemed people. By the powerful intervention, of God's holy angels, the Lord's people are protected from the direct assaults of the fallen and evil angels, or demons. The protection afforded God's people by angelic intervention, however, represents only one aspect of the angels' ministry on behalf of believers. Regarding the more general ministry of preservation and protection promised by God to all his redeemed and holy people, the Scripture says:

Psalms 91:11-12

⁽¹¹⁾ For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

⁽¹²⁾ They shall bear thee up in *their* hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. (See vv.9-16)

Satan misapplied this passage wilfully and grossly when he was tempting the Son of God. (Matt. 4:6) Nevertheless, this should not detract from the fact that God promises his people the protection of his holy and mighty angels. To a certain extent, however, this promise is conditional. It applies in full only to those who are abiding in the secret place of the Most High; i.e., who are walking in close fellowship with God. (Ps. 91:1)

God's Angels Protected Daniel

Concerning the interposition of the holy angels between God's people and the powers of evil—as exemplified by Daniel and the lions—it is written by that prophet:

Daniel 6:22

⁽²²⁾ My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. (See vv.10-27)

In this case, God exercised his works of providence through the agency of the holy angel whom he had sent to shut the lions' mouths, and thereby to protect Daniel from danger. As a rule, however, God's works of providence are exercised through more ordinary and natural means.

Angels Watch Over Children

The New Testament teaches that the angels of God keep watch over children and individuals. Concerning children, the Lord Jesus says:

Matthew 18:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. (See vv. 1-14)

The above passage does not prove that God has assigned a guardian angel to each believer, or to each individual child. A single angel, or a group of angels, may exercise wardship over a number of children. It should be noted, however, that the phrase 'little ones' may not refer only to children, but also to those who are young (or weak) in the faith; i.e., 'infant' believers, or weak believers.

From the Word of God, it is evident that holy angels stand in the presence of God to watch over his children. It is also evident from God's Word that these powerful angelic spirits minister to the needs of all those whom the Lord has chosen to be heirs of salvation. (Acts 27:23-24; Heb. 1:14)

Angels Take an Active Interest in the Church

Holy angels are represented as having a particular interest in the people of God as they assemble in the local places of worship. The Lord Jesus Christ, of course, is the head of the church. Angels must never be imagined to occupy a place of intercession or mediation in matters pertaining to the believer and his salvation (except in the sense that they are spirits who minister to the heirs of salvation).

Concerning the place of angels in regard to the church, the apostle Paul declares in connection with the head covering (the symbol of recognition of, and willing submission to, divinely appointed authority):

1 Corinthians 11:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ For this cause ought the woman to have power on *her* head because of the angels. (See vv.3-16)

Again, concerning the instructions that he had just given to Timothy regarding church leaders, the apostle Paul asserts:

1 Timothy 5:21

⁽²¹⁾ I charge *thee* before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. (See vv.17-20)

The holy angels are concerned for the heirs of salvation, and thus for every individual members of the true church. Nevertheless, the work of the elect and holy angels is in every respect subordinate to the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit on behalf of, and in the lives of, believers. Holy angels are the agents through whom God frequently executes his purposes concerning the church. However, the work of these angels does not equal in any sense the work of the Holy Spirit. Nor do the angels of God in any sense act as mediators between believers and their Father in heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ, whom angels gladly worship and serve, is the one and only Mediator between God and man. Similarly, the Holy Spirit is the only one who makes our prayers and petitions presentable and acceptable to God.

Angels Escort Souls of Believers to Heaven

In speaking of the death of the beggar Lazarus (in the account of the rich man and Lazarus), the Lord Jesus made it plain that angels were involved in conducting the departed and beloved Lazarus into his Saviour's immediate presence. Thus, the Lord Jesus says:

Luke 16:22a

^(22a) And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom... (See vv.1-31; cf. Matt. 8:11-12; Luke 13:28-29)

Upon the death of the body, the souls of God's redeemed people are escorted immediately into the presence of the Lord by the agency of the heavenly angels. Thus, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. (Luke 23:42-43; 2 Cor. 5:6,8; Phil. 1:21,23)

Part 6

Appearance and Appearances of Angels

Angels Appear as Men

Angels are spirits. They are highly intelligent beings, but they do not possess the same physical or material bodies as human beings do. Sometimes, the holy angels may assume human-like forms temporarily. As a rule, however, angels are incorporeal and invisible, except in heaven where the angelic multitudes are visible to all of God's redeemed people.

In earthly realms, when angels assume human-like form, they are usually recognised as God's angelic messengers by the heavenly majesty of their persons, or by the glory and radiance of their attire. Occasionally, however, when no such distinguishing features have been apparent, these holy messengers have not been recognised as the angels of God. For instance, shortly before the LORD destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, he appeared in human-like form to Abraham.

Accompanying the LORD were two glorious angelic messengers. However, as these powerful and glorious messengers of God had also assumed the appearance of ordinary men, their true nature and identity was hidden from Abraham.

The LORD's purpose in making this appearance was to confirm to Abraham his promise that his wife Sarah would indeed bear a son. In addition, it was God's purpose to warn Abraham of the coming judgment on the immoral cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. At this time, Abraham's nephew Lot was residing in Sodom. (Gen. 18:10-14,17-21) Thus, concerning this occasion, the Scripture says:

Genesis 18:1-2

⁽¹⁾ And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; ⁽²⁾ And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw *them*, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, (See vv.3-15)

As can be seen from the above passage, when the LORD and his two celestial messengers appeared to Abraham, the patriarch thought he was seeing three men. Subsequently, however, Abraham realised that one of these three 'men' was none other than the LORD himself. Concerning the other two, it seems that—throughout the time that the LORD spent with him—Abraham believed that he was conversing with the LORD and with two men. Abraham did not seem to be aware that these two 'men' were angels of God in human-like form.

After confirming to Abraham his promise regarding a son by Sarah, the LORD and his angelic messengers made to leave that place for Sodom. Thus, it is written:

Genesis 18:16-17

⁽¹⁶⁾ And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. ⁽¹⁷⁾ And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; (See vv.18-33)

Up to this point in the narrative, the two messengers accompanying the LORD have been referred to as *men*. However, when they arrived at the city of Sodom, the narrative reveals the true nature and identity of these 'men'. Thus, in chapter 19 of Genesis, it is written:

Genesis 19:1

⁽¹⁾ And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing *them* rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; (See vv.2-29)

Clearly, then, the two ‘men’ accompanying the LORD were in fact two angels of God, as the above verse reveals. However, on this occasion, nothing in their appearance or demeanour distinguished these holy angels from mortal men.

Angels Appear in Brilliant Clothing

Generally, when angels assume temporarily a human-like body, they appear as glorious beings and often seem to be dressed in bright or brilliant apparel—although, probably not ‘clothing’ as we know it. How much of this brilliance is due to the glory of the celestial messenger himself, and how much is due to the ‘clothing’ he assumes, is something that we cannot determine satisfactorily. We should note, however, that the glory of the angelic messenger is but a mere reflection of the majestic and superlative glory of the God whom he serves.

In Revelation chapter 15, the aged apostle John saw the sign in heaven of the seven angels with the seven last plagues of God’s terrible wrath. Concerning the appearance, authority, and clothing of these seven holy angels of God, John relates:

Revelation 15:6

⁽⁶⁾ And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.

(See vv.5-8; see also wider context, Rev. chapters 15 &16)

And, in chapter 18 of Revelation, the apostle John recounts:

Revelation 18:1

⁽¹⁾ And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.

(See vv.2-3; see also wider context, Rev. chapters 17-19)

The angels, who—on many different occasions—appeared to men and women in tangible form, always remind God’s people of the awesome and radiant glory of the Triune God. The angels are the obedient messengers of the glorious and eternal Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Triune God is the one whom every one of these holy angels continually worships and adores.

Appearance of Angels at the Empty Tomb

Following the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus and his subsequent removal from the cross, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea carried Jesus’ body to Joseph’s own rock-hewn tomb, and laid it there. Then, the religious and civil authorities had rolled a great stone against the entrance of the tomb, and sealed this massive stone firmly to the rock. Afterward, they posted a twenty-four hour Roman military guard at the entrance to the tomb. This guard of four soldiers per watch was to prevent anyone from disturbing the sealed tomb and attempting to remove the body.

When the women came to the tomb on the third day, however, they could not find any sign of the Roman soldiers. (At this time, these faithful women were unaware that the brave Roman soldiers had fled in terror from the scene!) Also, the women discovered that someone had broken through the seal and had removed the great stone from the tomb’s entrance. On peering inside, they could see that the body of the Lord Jesus was no longer there.

The Four Gospel Accounts

In the Gospels, there are four complementary accounts of this momentous event. We will look briefly at each one in turn, insofar as it relates to the appearance and involvement of angels as the heralds of the risen Christ.

Matthew's Account

Firstly, Matthew tells us:

Matthew 28:2-4

⁽²⁾ And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. ⁽³⁾ His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: ⁽⁴⁾ And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead *men*. (See vv.1-15)

Mark's Account

Secondly, according to Mark's account, as the women were nearing the tomb, they had been wondering how they would be able to remove the great stone from the tomb entrance. Thus, Mark records:

Mark 16:3-5

⁽³⁾ And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?

⁽⁴⁾ And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. ⁽⁵⁾ And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. (See vv.1-8)

Here, the angel of God is described as 'a young man'.

Luke's Account

Thirdly, according to Luke's account, before seeing the angels, the women had been gazing apprehensively into the empty tomb wondering what had become of the Lord Jesus. Thus, Luke says:

Luke 24:4-6

⁽⁴⁾ And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: ⁽⁵⁾ And as they were afraid, and bowed down *their* faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? ⁽⁶⁾ He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, (See vv.1-12)

John's Account

Fourthly, concerning Mary Magdalene who stood weeping near the empty tomb after the other disciples had left, the apostle John says:

John 20:10-12

⁽¹⁰⁾ Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. ⁽¹¹⁾ But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, *and looked* into the sepulchre, ⁽¹²⁾ And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. (See vv.1-18)

Summary of the Four Accounts

Now let us summarise these four Gospel accounts of the glorious angelic messengers:

(1) Matthew says:

Matthew 28:3

⁽³⁾ His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

(2) Mark says:

Mark 16:5

⁽⁵⁾ And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.

(3) Luke says:

Luke 24:4

⁽⁴⁾ And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:

(4) John says:

John 20:12

⁽¹²⁾ And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

The foregoing accounts give some indication of what the mighty angels of God looked like when they appeared in human-like form to the women at the tomb of the resurrected Lord Jesus.

Angels at the Ascension

In the presence of his followers, the risen Lord Jesus ascended through the heavens to his Father's own right hand. While the amazed and perplexed disciples beheld this magnificent sight, two angels of God appeared to them. Concerning this scene, the Scripture says:

Acts 1:10-11

⁽¹⁰⁾ And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; ⁽¹¹⁾ Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. (See v.9; cf. Mark 16:19)

Thus, God's angelic messengers were seen by all those disciples who had witnessed the Lord's ascension into heaven. These glorious messengers assured the disciples that their risen Lord would return one day—in power and great glory. (Matt. 24:30)

Part 7

Presence and Work of Angels at the Lord's Second Coming

Angels Will Accompany the Lord Jesus

The Bible tells us that a vast company of holy angels will attend the glorious second coming of the Lord Jesus. Thus, the Scripture says:

Matthew 16:27

⁽²⁷⁾ For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. (See vv.24-28)

Again, in Mark's Gospel, the Lord Jesus declares:

Mark 8:38

⁽³⁸⁾ Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. (See vv.34-37)

At his second advent, the Lord Jesus Christ will descend from heaven in his Father's glory. Accompanying him will be a vast multitude of holy angels. (1 Thess. 3:13) Then, the final stage of the redemption of God's people will commence. This will include the resurrection of the bodies of those who have died, the reuniting of bodies and souls, and the gathering together of all the elect to meet the Lord, and thus to be with him forever. (1 Cor. 15:12-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18)

Angels Will Gather the Elect

At his glorious second coming, the holy angels accompanying the Lord Jesus will be sent by him into every part of the world, and throughout the heavens, to gather together all of God's elect people. Thus, the Lord Jesus says:

Matthew 24:30-31

⁽³⁰⁾ And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ⁽³¹⁾ And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (See vv.26-35)

Or, according to Mark's account:

Mark 13:26-27

⁽²⁶⁾ And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. ⁽²⁷⁾ And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. (See vv.14-31)

Angels Will Separate the Righteous From the Wicked

In the process of gathering the elect, the angels will separate the righteous from the wicked. Concerning this separation of the saved from the lost, the Lord Jesus says:

Matthew 13:40-42

⁽⁴⁰⁾ As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. ⁽⁴¹⁾ The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; ⁽⁴²⁾ And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (See vv.24-30,36-43)

Similarly, in the parable of the net:

Matthew 13:47-50

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: ⁽⁴⁸⁾ Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. ⁽⁴⁹⁾ So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, ⁽⁵⁰⁾ And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

On another occasion, the Lord Jesus solemnly reminded his hearers that, immediately before the Noachic deluge, people had been going about their ordinary everyday lives. They had been eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. Likewise, immediately before the Lord's second coming, people will be going about their ordinary everyday lives. They will be engaged in their normal domestic, business, leisure, civil and religious activities. At such a time, however—and without any warning—the Lord will come, and all the holy angels with him. When this happens, the holy angels will begin the separation of the righteous from the wicked. Thus, the Lord Jesus warns:

Matthew 24:40-41

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. ⁽⁴¹⁾ Two *women shall be* grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. (See vv.36-44; cf. Luke 17:34-35)

These words were spoken in the context where the Lord is describing his second coming with his holy angels, and the immediate gathering together, by the angels, of God's elect. God's elect comprises every truly born again believer throughout the world; i.e., all those whom God has spiritually regenerated, justified and sanctified. (Matt. 24:30-31)

In the process of gathering the elect, the angels will extract the weeds (or tares) from the wheat; the good fish from the bad; the righteous from the wicked. (Matt. 13:30,36-43,48-49) In other words, at the second coming of the Lord, one will be taken [by the angels], and the other left.

The Lord Will Judge Everyone

When the Lord Jesus comes with his mighty angels, he will come not only to gather his elect (thereby separating the righteous from the wicked), but also to judge the world. The Lord will carry out the final judgment of all mankind and angels. Thus, the apostle Paul says:

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

⁽⁶⁾ Seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; ⁽⁷⁾ And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, ⁽⁸⁾ In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: ⁽⁹⁾ Who shall be punished with everlasting destruc-

tion from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; ⁽¹⁰⁾ When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. (See vv.11-12)

And again, Jude says:

Jude 1:14-15

⁽¹⁴⁾ And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, ⁽¹⁵⁾ To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard *speeches* which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. (See vv.4-19)

Again, concerning this final judgment, the Lord Jesus says:

Matthew 25:31-32

⁽³¹⁾ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: ⁽³²⁾ And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats: (See vv.33-46; cf. Rev. 20:11-15)

Final Separation and Eternal Judgment

Following the separation of the righteous from the wicked, both groups will appear (possibly, separately) before the judgment seat of Christ. The Lord will judge each person in each of the two groups individually. Those who, from eternity, have had their names written in the Lamb's book of life—i.e., the elect or righteous—will enter into the full blessings and privileges of eternal life in the presence of God.

The wicked, constituting the wilfully impenitent remainder of fallen mankind, will be judged and consigned to hell. Hell is that place and state of eternal separation from the presence and favour of God. In practical terms, this means everlasting separation from God's love, mercy, and compassion. It also means exposure to God's justice, righteousness, and holy wrath. This is the just punishment that the wicked will endure throughout all the ages of eternity, with no hope of remission or of ultimate deliverance.

The Terrors of Hell Reserved for the Finally Impenitent

Hell is a place and state of everlasting torments of body and soul. It is a place where the finally and wilfully impenitent (the lost) are deprived of God's love, and of the convicting and restraining operations of the Holy Spirit in common grace. It is a place where their consciences will forever accuse them of their sin of refusing to believe the truth, and so be saved; i.e., to believe on the one and only Son of God. Had they sought the Lord and believed his Word, they would have been saved from the sentence of condemnation upon sin, and from God's abiding and terrible wrath against impenitent sinners. But, once finally judged, condemned and committed to the terrors of hell, it is too late to call upon the Lord for mercy. From those in hell, God has forever withdrawn his grace and mercy.

Again, hell is the place prepared for the devil and his (fallen) angels or demons. (Matt. 25:41)

Sometimes, the Lord Jesus speaks of hell as a 'fiery furnace' or 'furnace of fire' (Matt. 13:42,50), or as an 'eternal fire' or 'fire of hell' (Matt. 18:8-9). The book of Revelation portrays hell as a 'lake of fire' or as a 'lake of burning sulphur' (Rev. 20:10,14-15; cf. Rev. 14:9-11).

Probably, terms such as 'fiery furnace' or 'lake of fire', etc., should be understood figuratively. However, the point of using such powerful language is to emphasise the terrible nature of hell's torments. It is the language of analogy or comparison. This means that the *actual* torments of hell (in body and soul)

must be equal to, or greater than, the torments that a person would endure in a literal lake of fire. This assumes, of course, that the body has been so transformed to make it susceptible of suffering—but not of death or annihilation—in that fire. Such is the dreadful nature of hell's everlasting torments for all those who die finally impenitent.⁸

Believers Will Judge Angels

The Bible tells us that the redeemed and glorified people of God will judge angels. Thus, the apostle Paul asks of the believers at Corinth:

1 Corinthians 6:2-3

⁽²⁾ Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? ⁽³⁾ Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? (See vv.1-8)

This judgment of angels may relate only to the fallen angels or demons, whom God has destined for eternal punishment. The Word of God does not tell us expressly that we will be judging good or holy angels.

However, in the Bible, the phrase 'to judge' often means 'to rule' or 'to preside' over. If this is the meaning of the term here, then—in the coming age—the people of God may be ruling over the world, rather than judging it. Similarly, in the coming age, the people of God would then be understood to be ruling over angels, rather than judging them.

⁸ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: The Second Coming; The Last Judgment; Heaven; Hell*, by Gordon Lyons.

Part 8

'Angels of the Churches'

The word 'angel' means 'messenger', 'minister', or 'servant'. In Greek, the word is 'angelos', from *angellos*, 'to deliver a message'. Sometimes, the designation 'angel' may be applied metaphorically to the ministers or servants of God's church. This may be the case in the opening chapters of the book of Revelation. There, in each of his letters to the seven churches of Asia, the apostle John uses the expression, 'to the angels of the church...' Thus, for example, the inspired apostle says

Revelation 1:20

⁽²⁰⁾ The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels {or *messengers*} of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches. (See vv.10-19)

And:

Revelation 2:1

⁽¹⁾ Unto the angel {or *messenger*} of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; (See also Rev. 2:8,12,18; 3:1,7,14)

From this context, it would appear that the 'angels' of the churches were in fact the leaders or representatives of each of the local churches mentioned. Nothing else can be determined from the Scriptures with any degree of certainty.

Worship of Angels Forbidden

(*The Colossian Heresy*)

The Word of God expressly forbids the worship of angels. This was one of the heresies that had begun to infect the church at Colosse. (Col. 2:18-19; Rev. 19:10; 22:9)

The worship of angels was an especially dangerous heresy, since it involved the sin of idolatry. Wherever there was a tendency to exalt the angels improperly, God's Son was being displaced and dishonoured in the minds and hearts of his people. God has exalted his Son to the place of supreme authority, dignity, and honour above every created being throughout the entire universe. (Phil. 2:9-11) This includes angels, for angels are created beings. (Ps. 148:2,5; Col. 1:16) The glorified Lord Jesus alone was, and is, to be worshipped and adored.

The church at Colosse, however, had failed to acknowledge fully the exclusive supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently, they had begun to exalt and idolise God's holy angels. The Colossians were giving to the angels a place of honour and respect that was not due to them as created beings. Indeed, the Colossian had even begun to *worship* angels—something that God's Word utterly forbids. (Exodus 20:3-4)

In view of their very grave sin, the apostle Paul feels constrained to write to the Colossian church to express in the strongest possible terms his denunciation of their actions. In this letter, the apostle warns against this and other heresies, which the believers at Colosse had embraced or which they had been tolerating in their midst. Speaking by the authority and inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, Paul in-

structs the Colossian church to remain faithful to the pure and unadulterated teaching of God's Word, and to that Word alone.

The Pre-Eminence of God's Son

Concerning the pre-eminence of the Son of God over all creation, including the angels, God's Word says:

Colossians 1:15-17

⁽¹⁵⁾ Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

⁽¹⁶⁾ For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: ⁽¹⁷⁾ And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

The apostle continues:

Colossians 1:18-20

⁽¹⁸⁾ And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence.

⁽¹⁹⁾ For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fullness dwell; ⁽²⁰⁾ And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, *I say*, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven. (See vv.21-23; cf. vv.15,18 with Rom. 8:29; Heb. 1:6)

Meaning of the Term 'Firstborn'

In passing, we should note that, in verses 15 and 18 of Colossians chapter 1 (quoted above), the use of the term 'firstborn' does not imply origin, beginning or creation of life. Sometimes, this term is used in a legal or official sense to refer to one who is afforded *priority of status* or *priority of office*, together with certain rights or privileges. In such cases, the rights of the 'firstborn' are rights that have been bestowed upon a person graciously, legally, or officially, rather than the rights and privileges of primogeniture. In addition, the term 'firstborn' can be used to denote other types of priority or pre-eminence that are not connected with physical birthrights or privileges.

The term 'firstborn' has at least three very distinct applications in the Word of God. Firstborn can mean:

1. *Priority of birth*; including the rights and privileges of primogeniture.
2. *Priority of status or office*; bestowed graciously, legally or officially upon a person, without reference to birth.
3. *Priority of resurrection*; denoting the first person (Christ) to rise from death, never to die again.

In each of these cases, the term 'firstborn' is used. Clearly, however, only meaning (1) above is used in the sense of a person who is literally (first) born. The other two senses do not involve any reference to priority of birth or creation, but to priority of status, rank, or position. The following passages should help to illustrate and clarify this matter.

Israel as God's 'Firstborn Son'

Concerning God's choice of the people of Israel, and immediately before their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, it is written in the book of Exodus:

Exodus 4:22-23

⁽²²⁾ And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel *is* my son, *even* my firstborn: ⁽²³⁾ And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, *even* thy firstborn. (See vv.18-31)

In the above passage, the term 'firstborn' is used in two distinctly different senses. In verse 22, the entire nation of Israel is termed God's 'firstborn son'. Clearly, the context indicates *priority of status*. On this occasion, it cannot indicate priority of birth since the verse comprehends every member (male and female) of every Israelite family, and not just the firstborn son of each family. In verse 23, however, the term is used in its more accustomed sense to indicate the literal firstborn son of every Egyptian family.

Many centuries later, the LORD God again refers to the nation of Israel as his 'firstborn son'. Thus, concerning the post-exilic restoration of Israel, it is written in Jeremiah chapter 31:

Jeremiah 31:9

⁽⁹⁾ They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim *is* my firstborn. (See vv.1-14)

From the above passage, it is abundantly evident that the term 'firstborn' does not always relate to creation, origin, or birth. Often, it relates to priority of status or office.

David as God's 'Firstborn Son'

As another example of the same kind, and concerning David, king of Israel, it is written in the Word of God:

Psalms 89:27

⁽²⁷⁾ Also I will make him *my* firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. (See vv.20-29)

Clearly, King David could be God's firstborn son only by divine appointment. David was firstborn in a legal or official capacity. This is yet another instance of the term 'firstborn' relating—not to birth—but to priority of status or priority of office.

The Sense in Which Jesus is God's Firstborn Son

In a much greater sense than either David or Israel, however, the Lord Jesus Christ is God's firstborn Son. The Son is the firstborn of the Father in respect of his incarnation. This relates to the time when, in assuming human likeness (sin apart), the Son of God was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born at Bethlehem of the virgin, Mary. Before this, God's Son had been eternally existent in heaven with his Father and with the Holy Spirit.

This, however, is not the only sense in which the term 'firstborn' is used of the Lord Jesus Christ. The eternal Son of God is 'firstborn' in relation to his pre-eminence, status and offices: That is, God has appointed him as Redeemer, Prophet, Priest and King of his people; as the sole Head of the church, and as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Again, the Lord Jesus is 'firstborn' in relation to his triumphant resurrection from the dead: That is, Christ is the first to rise from the dead never to die again, and the Leader and Head of all believers who themselves will be resurrected.

Again, Christ is 'firstborn' in relation to his position over all creation: That is, he is the Supreme Ruler over the entire creation, and all creation must yet acknowledge and bow to his absolute supremacy.

We will illustrate some of these points briefly below:

God's Son is The 'Firstborn' From the Dead

Referring to the Lord's priority in the resurrection from the dead (i.e., never to die again), the Scripture says:

Colossians 1:18

⁽¹⁸⁾ And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the pre-eminence.

The Lord Jesus was the first person to arise from the dead (never to die again). Those believers who died before the resurrection of Christ, and whose souls are now in glory, are still awaiting the resurrection of their bodies. Therefore, as far as the bodily resurrection from the dead is concerned, they have not preceded Christ. Similarly, the bodies of those holy ones who were raised at the time of Jesus' resurrection did not precede the Lord. Yet again, individuals such as Lazarus and others whom the Lord raised from the dead did not precede the Lord's bodily resurrection. For, when Lazarus and others were raised, their bodies were restored to life but not translated. Therefore, in due course, they would die again and would remain in the grave until the final resurrection of the body.

The Son of God arose bodily, never to die again. Concerning the permanent resurrection of the body, the glorified and exalted Lord Jesus is the 'firstborn': That is, since he was the first to be raised bodily and permanently, he assumes *priority of resurrection* over everyone else who has yet to be raised bodily and permanently.

God's Son is The 'Firstborn' Over All Creation

Concerning the exalted Son of God, the apostle Paul says in the first chapter of Colossians

Colossians 1:15

⁽¹⁵⁾ Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

In this verse, 'firstborn' clearly implies priority of status and office over everything throughout the created universe. The Son of God is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is supreme over all rule and authority. Everything and everyone in creation must yield to his sovereign sway. From this, it is evident that, when speaking of the Son as the 'firstborn' over all creation, reference is being made to the eternal Son's *priority of status and offices*. He is the 'firstborn' in the sense that he is pre-eminent or supreme.

Similarly, in the second chapter of Colossians, the apostle Paul says:

Colossians 2:9-10

⁽⁹⁾ For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

⁽¹⁰⁾ And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: (See vv.1-15)

God's Son is Supreme Over Angels

In emphasising the uncreated Son's infinitely superior position over created angels, the apostle Paul says:

Colossians 2:18-19

⁽¹⁸⁾ Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshiping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, ⁽¹⁹⁾ And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. (See vv.16-23)

Here, it is explicitly stated that anyone who insists on accepting or pursuing such heresies as the worship of angels, is a person who has lost connection with the Head of the church. He is out of fellowship with Christ, and is in grave danger of demonstrating that he is severed from Christ.

Again, in emphasising the pre-eminence of God's Son, and the subordinate role of angels, the writer to the Hebrews says:

Hebrews 1:3-4

⁽³⁾ Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

⁽⁴⁾ Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. (See vv. 1-2)

Note that the Son of God is the brightness or radiance of God's glory: i.e., of divine glory. This means that the Son of God possesses all the attributes that God the Father possesses. The *glory* of God is the sum of all his attributes, and it is the transcendent glory of the only uncreated and eternal Being in the universe.

In contrast to the Son's glory, the glory of angels is that of created beings. These created spirits are superhuman, but they are not divine. They are mighty in power, but they are not almighty. Angels are still finite creatures, and therefore are subject to the limitations of created beings.

All God's Angels Worship the Son

All holy angels, including the mighty cherubim, seraphim, and archangels of God, worship the exalted and glorified Lord Jesus. This proves that, as inferior beings, the angels are not themselves objects of worship. Concerning this, the writer of Hebrews says:

Hebrews 1:5-6

⁽⁵⁾ For unto which of the angels said he at any time,

Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee? *{Psalm 2:7}*

And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? *{2 Samuel 7:14; 1 Chron. 17:13}*

⁽⁶⁾ And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith,

And let all the angels of God worship him. *{Deut. 32:43 LXX}*

Again, the writer of Hebrews asks rhetorically:

Hebrews 1:13-14

⁽¹³⁾ But to which of the angels said he at any time,

Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? *{Psalm 110:1}*

⁽¹⁴⁾ Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

Angels Will Not Rule the Age to Come

Although mighty in power, and invested with great authority, the ministering angels of God will not become rulers in the coming world (or age). God and his Son will be rule in that age, together with the redeemed and glorified children of God.

Concerning the place of angels in the future, God's Word says:

Hebrews 2:5-8

⁽⁵⁾ For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.

⁽⁶⁾ But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?

⁽⁷⁾ Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands:

⁽⁸⁾ Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. *{Psalm 8:4-6}* For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing *that is* not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. (See entire chapter; cf. v.6 with Job 7:17)

Angel Worship Rebuked

In the book of Revelation, one of the holy angels rebuked the apostle John when he was about to fall down and worship that celestial servant of God. Thus, in Revelation chapter 19, it is written of John:

Revelation 19:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, *See thou do it not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.* (Cf. Rev. 22:8-9; see also Acts 10:25; Rev. 1:17)

Worship Jesus!

As created finite beings, angels are not—and never can become—the objects of divine worship. The holy angels are greater in might, glory and authority than any man in his present state of existence. They are gifted with much greater mental and intellectual faculties than man. However, in relation to the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the angels are vastly inferior spirit beings. The Triune God alone is uncreated. The Godhead alone is infinite. The persons of the Godhead alone possess the attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. They alone are perfect to an infinite degree: in love, mercy, compassion, justice, truth, wisdom, holiness, righteousness, wrath and all the

other characteristics or perfections of their divinity. They alone are sovereign over all creation, including the most holy and most exalted angels.

Angels and mankind worship God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Worship and devotion, adoration and praise, prayer and petition, is properly afforded to the Persons of the trinity. We must never afford these things to angels, for they are not proper objects of worship nor are they mediators between God and man. Nor must we offer any form of worship, adoration, or prayer to God or to his Son via any other created person or being—no matter how highly exalted. We must offer all our worship, adoration and prayer to God and to his Son in and through the name and mediation of his Son, and in and through the name and intercession of the Holy Spirit.

Concerning the worship and devotion offered to God's Son by all classes of holy angels, the Scripture says:

Revelation 5:7-14

⁽⁷⁾ And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.

⁽⁸⁾ And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four *and* twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

⁽⁹⁾ And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

⁽¹⁰⁾ And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

⁽¹¹⁾ And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;

⁽¹²⁾ Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

⁽¹³⁾ And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, *be* unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever.

⁽¹⁴⁾ And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four *and* twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth forever and ever.

Jesus Christ is Lord of all. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Let all God's angels, and all mankind, worship and adore him! For, above all others, he is worthy! Amen.