

Angels Still Around Us

Bonny's guardian angel

Remember that I wrote last time about the fact and fiction of guardian angels? We found that the Bible does not support the belief that each person has his own guardian angel. After I finished that article I came across this remarkable bit of news on the internet on www.abc.net.au: "Cat survives being walled in under bath for 7 weeks. A four-year-old cat called Bonny has survived after being walled in beneath a bathtub in Germany for seven weeks, its owner said. "It's a miracle." 60-year-old widow Monika Hoppert said. "I'm a strong believer, I think she must have had a guardian angel. I'm so happy." Bonny disappeared on June 19 while workmen were replacing pipes in the block of flats where Ms Hoppert lives. The cladding around a bathtub was removed and just before the tub was sealed up again, Bonny had probably crept underneath, Ms Hoppert said. When the cat was found, his weight had dropped from six kilograms to two kilograms. Ms Hoppert nursed her back to health with watered down kitten food. "She's almost back to normal now. This morning was the first time she'd jumped onto my bed again," she said."

Ms Hoppert says she is a strong believer. I am sure you *need* to be to think that your cat has a guardian angel! Let's just say that we are happy for Ms Hoppert and her cat, and turn from fiction to fact once more.

The Holy Spirit, angels, and revelation

Last time we finished the article with the conclusion that the changing of the dispensations of the covenant has consequences for the ministry of angels in our time, the Pentecostal era. In this final article about the angels I will write about these consequences.

The first consequence relates to the specific office of angels, the office of being messengers of the almighty God. You may remember our discussion about the work and nature of angels. We found that the nature of angels is spiritual (Hb. 1:14) and that their office is that of messenger. There are many examples of that in the Bible. The highlight of this aspect of the angels' work is no doubt the time when Gabriel announced the birth of the Messiah to his mother Mary. Angels do many more things, but the aspect of being messengers of God is the most prominent one.



Revelation completed

However, this prominent task of angels has ceased in the time of the new covenant. No longer do angels bring God's Word to his children.

In some places in the New Testament we find that angels still revealed God's will to his servants, most notably in the last book of the Bible, Revelation (see Rev. 1:1-2). But after that it stopped, as the special revelation of God's Word was finished in the completed Bible. In the time of Old and New Testament the Holy Spirit inspired people to write down the infallible Word of God. Now that God's revelation in the Bible is completed, inspiration has made place for illumination. The Holy Spirit now guides the church in the truth of Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:26; 16:12-15). The Spirit of God illumines the darkened hearts and minds of God's children to understand his Word and to apply it to their lives. God has even given special office bearers to proclaim this Word of God with authority to the church (Eph. 4:11-12).

This task of passing on God's word and will to his children was part of the extraordinary ministry of the angels, the ministry that saw them operating in crucial times of redemptive history. This extraordinary ministry was often also a visible ministry, meaning that angels would often show themselves to people when they brought God's messages to them. But now we have God's Word and we have God's Spirit to help us to understand God's Word. In that respect the angels are no longer needed. We have all the information we need about God and his will and plan in the Bible. No extra revelation is necessary for our salvation (BC art. 7). As a matter of fact, Paul says: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:8)!

When the Spirit of God was poured out over the church, there were no angels present. Is this a coincidence? I think not. We see angels announcing the birth of Jesus and singing God's praises in the fields of Bethlehem. We see angels ministering to the Lord just before he is arrested and nailed to the cross. Again we see angels at the empty grave and also when the Lord Jesus ascends into heaven. But the next glorious moment in redemptive history, Pentecost, sees no angels. That is not a coincidence. The Spirit of God is poured out to empower the church to proclaim the good news of the victory over sin and death to the world! Angels are no longer needed in that respect.

This anointing with the Spirit of God is enjoyed not only by the office bearers of the church, but by all the members of the church of Christ. Says 1 Jn. 2:27: "The anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you." I guess in a way all God's children are like angels now. We may all proclaim God's will and gospel to the world. In fact, LD 12 says: "I am a member of Christ by faith and share in his anointing, so that I may as prophet confess his name." In the time of the new covenant we are all bearers of good tidings, guided and equipped by special office bearers.

The Holy Spirit, angels, and warfare

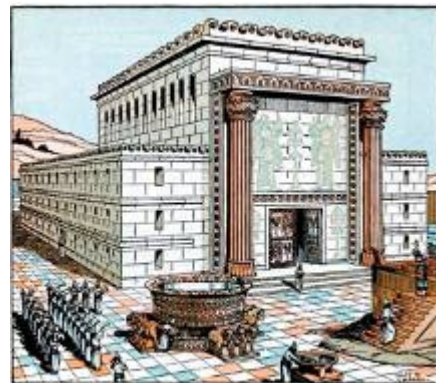
The second consequence of the changing of the dispensations for the ministry of angels is the changing of the character or the nature of

the people of God, if I may say so. In the time of the old covenant the people of God were a physical people, they were their own nation, with their own land and national laws, in a Theo-cracy with God as King. In the time of the new covenant the people of God form a spiritual kingdom (Jn. 18:36). They do no longer live in one particular land, but are spread out over the whole world.

This means that the nature of the warfare of the worldwide church of Christ has changed as well. In the old covenant the warfare was mostly physical, there was enmity with surrounding peoples who sought to destroy the people of God. Of course there was also spiritual enmity as the people of God needed to be kept clean and holy from all idolatry, among other things. However, in the new covenant, the warfare is a spiritual one. The church of Christ in the world has no territory to defend. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, says the apostle Paul. In 2 Cor. 10:4 Paul writes: "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds." And in Eph. 6:10-20 we are told to put on the armour of God "for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

In the time of the new covenant, unlike in the old covenant, we are not physically separated from the world outside. On the contrary, in the time after Pentecost the church is sent out *into* the world; the church is mobilised, she must take up her arms and bring the gospel of salvation to the world.

For that reason the Spirit of God was poured out over the church. The body of the church as well as her individual members enjoy divine protection. In 1 Cor. 3:16-17 Paul says to the church of Corinth: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple." Today we live in a Christo-cracy: Christ is King and he reigns over his church through his Word and Spirit.



Temple

And so, the role of angels as protectors of the people of God has changed. In the old dispensation the angelic hosts of God surrounded the physical people of God. In the new dispensation the Spirit of God himself has made a dwelling place in the church and in our very hearts. In the new dispensation God has come even closer to his people than in the old. If you think that the angels are impressive, then consider that in this Pentecostal era God himself dwells in your heart!

This does not mean that the people of God in the old covenant did not have the Holy Spirit – no one can believe unless the Spirit gives him

faith. However, the gift of the Spirit in the old covenant was like a local rain enjoyed by few (Num. 11:29), compared to the downpour of the Spirit in the new covenant (Acts 2:17-18). Promises have been fulfilled, the old covenant symbols have come to an end in Jesus Christ. Our time is so much richer than the old covenant. The angels have moved into the background, because Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit who glorifies him (Jn. 16:14) have taken the spotlight.

Angels in the background

There is a great difference between the work of the Spirit of God and the angels. The Spirit dwells in us, but not the angels. There is no reason to believe that the angels have withdrawn into heaven, quite the contrary, but their help is 'outside' help, while the help and guidance of the Spirit is 'inside' help. Angels still provide outside help. Their protection is unseen and unheard. 1 Pt. 5:8 tells us that the great adversary of the church, the devil, goes around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. We have to do combat with him in our personal lives as we fight him, the world and our own flesh. However, we and the church are not alone. The armies of heaven are also fighting the forces of evil (Rev. 19:11-16). We do not know what that battle looks like. We know that it is a spiritual battle. And, more importantly, we know that this battle has already been decided. Christ is Victor! And we wait and persevere until the day when he returns from heaven as Judge to proclaim final victory.

Both the Spirit of God and the angels assist the believers. The great difference between them is of course, that angels are not God. We do not pray to the angels, nor invoke their help. We pray to God and he will support and protect us, through his Spirit and/or his angels, whichever way he chooses. We pray the Spirit of God: "Spirit of all understanding, of all grace, of truth, and prayer, show the paths of life unending; always guide us, everywhere." (Hymn 36:2 BoP). Only the Spirit is glorified with our prayer for assistance, not angels.

In the background angels are still there to protect us, as part of their ordinary ministry. Like I said in an earlier article, there are reports of angels who save the lives of God's children in most miraculous ways. These credible reports are rare but there is no reason to doubt them. God has not recalled his angels when the Holy Spirit was poured out. They are not dormant, idly waiting for the Day of Judgment. They are there, but we can not usually see what they do for us.

There will come a time, however, when we *will* see them. There is one more crucial moment in redemptive history that lies in the future, and that is the time of the return of our Lord Jesus Christ on the clouds of heaven. With the voice of an archangel the Lord will descend from heaven (1 Tess. 4:16). The Lord will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call to gather his elect from the four winds (Matt. 24:31). God's heavenly armies will show themselves as they gather and separate the wheat and the tares. On that day everyone will see the Son of Man

and the angels accompanying him, coming to bring final and complete victory to this world. What a sight that will be!

The End

And with that we have come to the end of a number of articles about the angels of God. Reading through past installments I realise that the material presented was at times sketchy. I hope, however, that the articles have helped you not only to understand more about the work of the angels, but even more to see the greatness and majesty of God – their and our Master.

If you have questions about these articles, please write me an email: revrupke@westnet.com.au. If there are many questions, I can address them in one more article. If you would like to read more about the angels, I recommend the book by dr. David Jeremiah, *What The Bible Says About Angels*, United States of America 1996. Use it with care though, because I think (it is not expressly mentioned) it is millennialistic and also supports the idea of the so called rapture. Other than that dr. Jeremiah presents the Biblical material in a comprehensive manner, which makes it quite suitable for personal study.

Render God Your Praise

Let me conclude with a hymn from our Book of Praise which sings the praises to our God seated on his heavenly throne, worshipped and adored by his mighty angels, Hymn 2:1. To him be all the glory in heaven and on earth!

“O God, we praise Thee, we acknowledge Thee as Lord.
Eternal Father, Thou art everywhere adored.
The cherubim and seraphim their homage show Thee:
“O Thou Lord God of hosts art holy, holy, holy!
Both heav’n and earth are filled with Thy majestic splendour.”
To Thee all angels loud and ceaseless praises render.”

E. Rupke