

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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Ministering Spirits

Jay Graham

Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14).

The Scriptures mention angels a lot. There is a lot we know about angels as described in God's Word. With this said, there does still seem to be a lot we do not know. There is no doubt angels were used by the Lord for various purposes, varying from serving the Lord's people to executing judgment and wrath upon the wicked. Angels were often used as a method for the Lord to extend comfort and help to His people. They were used as messengers of both good and fearful tidings (the English word "angel" literally means "messenger").

The question I would like to address in this article is, "Do angels serve the Lord's people in these uninspired times?" By "uninspired," I mean times after the first century when we do not have the miraculous revelations of the Spirit. If not for the revelations of the Spirit, we would have never known of angels and their operations in the first place. So if angels do serve the Lord's people in these uninspired times, how would we know? In short, I believe they can and probably do serve the Lord's Christians at various times. However, because we live in uninspired times, I cannot say for sure, and for this reason, I cannot say exactly how, but I am convinced they can and do.

Angels were very active throughout the Old Testament. They served Abraham, Hagar, Moses, many of the prophets as well as Israel many times. Angels served Zacharias and Joseph and Mary by announcing John and Jesus' coming to this earth. They served Jesus as prophesied in **Psalm 91:11**. They served Him at His temptation in **Matthew 4:11**. They served Jesus at, perhaps, the most difficult time in His life as He poured out His anguish to His Father in the Garden in **Luke 22:43** as an angel gave Him strength to undergo His gravest of trials. Finally, they served the two Marys at Jesus' tomb just after His resurrection.

Angels served the newly formed church by helping the apostles Paul and Peter and probably others of their number in the first century. An angel served Cornelius in his desire to worship and learn more about the Lord.

I am convinced angels serve the Lord's Christians even into this twenty-first century. There is no reason why the principle established in **Psalm 34:7** cannot apply to today, for it says, *"The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him and delivers them."* This certainly is not to say that bad things do not

happen to the Lord's people, for they certainly do. But the principle can still apply, and we may still conclude His angels deliver them/us!

There are two separate passages in the Hebrew letter that help lead me to conclude that the Lord's Christians are served by angels in some fashion even today. The first is in **Hebrews 1:14**, *"Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?"* All saints in the NT church aim to inherit salvation, whether they lived in the first century or the twenty-first century as well as all those in between! As to how they minister or serve Christians, I cannot be sure.

There is also the passage in **Hebrews 13:2**, *"Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels."* This passage specifically states we may "unwittingly" make contact with angels. This teaches me that if and when we do so, we are not aware of the contact. This passage certainly does not say we do not contact them; it just says we are not aware of them!

Finally, I would like to consider a personal story that happened to our family many years ago while living in Colorado. We went to the Jay St. church building one Wednesday evening, and we found a couple waiting on the steps to the building. They told us they were from Ecuador, and they said their passports and funds had been stolen while they were vacationing in the United States. The couple had no place to stay and no money to pay for a motel. They told us they were members of a church of Christ in their home country, which is why they sought a similar church. After conversing with them a bit, it was obvious to me they were well acquainted with the churches of Christ and the New Testament Scriptures, so we invited them to stay in our home while they awaited their new papers and funds. They never asked for a place to stay, and they never asked for money, and we felt comfortable with having them in our home.

They were there for about two weeks or so. During this time, they voluntarily helped with various chores around the house as if they were part of our family, and they even did some repair work on our house, only asking us to purchase the necessary supplies needed for the repairs. Then, a package arrived at our house addressed to them, and they announced they would be departing for their home the next day. We asked them to notify us when they arrived home safely. We never heard from them anymore.

Were they angels ministering to us? I cannot be sure. However, I think they could have been. If they were, they met the exact criteria described in both of the verses in Hebrews. So I suspect they were angels, but because we may have

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entertained them "unwittingly," I cannot be sure. What do you think?

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No Sweat

Charles Fry

If someone said, "no sweat," we would probably understand the meaning to be, "this won't be hard." If someone said, "don't sweat it," we would probably take the meaning as, "don't be afraid or anxious." Sweat correlates with difficulty, hard work, stress, and anxiety. The Bible specifically mentions sweat three times.

The first time we encounter sweat in the Bible is in the pronouncement of consequences for human rebellion against God in **Genesis 3**. Along with the consequences for the Serpent and the Woman, there were consequences for the ground and vegetation and Mankind. **Genesis 3:17-19** describes the much more difficult life Adam and Eve would have outside the Garden of God, where the ground was now cursed, and adequate food would be challenging due to the abundance of thorns and thistles. Humanity was demoted from the readily available fruit of the trees in the garden to the plants of the field, which had previously been given to the beasts (**1:29, 30, 3:18**). While caring for the garden had been work for the Man and the Woman, it was not like the painful toil that lay ahead where "by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" until you return to dust in death. The combination of "face" and "dust" in **Genesis 3:19** takes us back to the day of man's creation when God "formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils (face) the breath of life" (**Genesis 2:7**). Adam was created with the necessary physical equipment for perspiration, but the arduous demands of life outside the garden would be sweat-inducing labor and stress. The face that God had shaped and breathed life into was fated to sweat in order to live and then return to dust.

Several thousand years after the first Adam was sent out of the garden, the last Adam (**1 Corinthians 15:45, 15:22; Romans 5:12-15**) came into the world to defeat the Serpent who had deceived Eve, fulfilling the divine promise in **Genesis 3:15**. This Man, Jesus, went to a garden on the slope of the Mt. of Olives east of Jerusalem night after night to pray during his last week as a mortal man. **John 18:1** refers to the garden where Jesus prayed, using a Greek word that is also in **Ezekiel 36:35** (LXX) describing the Garden of Eden. The Olivet garden was called Gethsemane (**Matthew 26:36**), which means "oil press," so probably there were olive trees there. While Jesus was there in the garden, he prayed so ardently that **Luke 22:44** reports

Jesus, "being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." The medical term for sweating blood is "hematidrosis." It's a rare condition and not well understood. Apparently, when a person is in unbearable distress, the tiny capillaries under the skin can burst and bloody sweat oozes from the sweat glands. Usually, the condition occurs in the skin of the face, perhaps the eyes, and the nose. On rare occasions, women in particularly difficult labor for childbirth have sweated blood, as Jesus did in the garden. A few hours after Jesus sweated blood for our sake, he also was ridiculed with a crown of thorns pressed on his head (**Matthew 27:29**) and then crucified on a tree (**Acts 5:30**, a common description of the cross).

So, on the night of his betrayal, we see Jesus dealing with the sin that began in the Garden of Eden. As Man was condemned to live by the sweat of his face, we have the "last Adam" who was the "seed of the woman" predicted in **Genesis 3:15**, sweating blood in the garden, for our sake. Then we see him facing the thorns of the curse in a rather literal way when the soldiers mocked him before he was nailed to a tree to die because the Woman and the Man had taken the fruit of the tree that God had not given to them.

The third time sweat is mentioned in the Bible is in **Ezekiel 44:18**. The context is Ezekiel's vision of the new temple presided over by the Prince, who is Jesus. Several elements of Ezekiel's vision are like John's vision of the New Jerusalem in **Revelation 21-22**. The temple builder (and city builder) here is divine, not merely human, and Jesus alluded to himself as the one who would raise up the temple in **John 2:19-22** (see also **1 Corinthians 3:16, Ephesians 2:19-22**). When Ezekiel heard the description of priests in the divine temple, their garments were described as "linen" and not "anything that causes sweat." The priests in God's new temple are to be clothed in linen so that they will not sweat in their service. This is a link back to life in the Garden of Eden, where the work of the Man and the Woman was pleasant and useful but not laborious sweat-producing drudgery. Linen had been the primary fabric for the garments of priests and Levites who served at the Tabernacle and Temple. Here Ezekiel gives us an insight into one of God's reasons. Linen is a light, cool, breathable fabric that doesn't cause the wearer to sweat. If we continue on in the New Testament, we repeatedly see Christians described as priests of God (see **1 Peter 2:9, Revelation 1:6**, for example). What are the priests of God who serve under Christ to wear? The bride of Christ, another description of the church, the kingdom of priests, has been "granted to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure" and "fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints" (**Revelation 19:8**).

Jesus sweated for us so that we don't have to sweat out the consequences of sin. The "righteous deeds of the saints," like the work of dressing and keeping of the Garden of Eden, is not arduous labor that sustains life by the sweat of our own face. Jesus has faced the curse in all its consequences so that we

could be clothed in the cool, clean white linen of righteousness. No sweat for us.

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Dual Citizenship

Isaac Rude

I was talking to a coworker recently who is a native of the Philippines. She has been a U.S. citizen for many years now. I was surprised when she told me that she was trying to gain dual citizenship. She informed me that when you become an American citizen, you forfeit your natural citizenship automatically. This got me to thinking about **Philippians 3:20**, *"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."* How much do we value our earthly citizenship?

I personally appreciate the fact very much that I am a citizen of the USA. I appreciate the rights afforded by our Constitution and see no scriptural reason why Christians should not exercise those rights if they choose to do so just as Paul exercised the rights afforded him as a Roman citizen at times (see **Acts 16:37, 22:28, and 25:11**). But, which citizenship do we put the most emphasis on? Ask the brethren in any meeting house around this country which citizenship is our primary. I am sure that they will give you the same answer as I received at my home congregation. But do my actions show which citizenship I value most? What makes me angrier? Watching my earthly homeland deteriorate and crumble or hearing people scoff and mock at the heavenly kingdom to which I belong? Do I spend more time fretting about my potential to lose rights in this country that the Constitution guaranteed than I do rejoicing for the freedom I have thanks to what Christ Jesus did for me?

We sing that "I can't feel at home in this world anymore," but I often do feel quite at home here. **Hebrews 11:8-10** tells us that by faith, Abraham forsook his earthly homeland and lived as a stranger and pilgrim while waiting for a better heavenly city. Would I do the same? Likewise, the Jews looked for Jesus to restore the earthly kingdom of Israel when he walked the earth (see **Acts 1:6**). It seemed that it even took the apostles a while to grasp that God was doing something much bigger and better.

Compare and contrast our different citizenships. America is a Republic. The Kingdom of Heaven is a monarchy (**1 Corinthians 15:24-26**). No voting or protesting in the Kingdom of Heaven! Do we have freedom of speech in the kingdom of heaven? In **Acts 4:20**, the apostles could only speak the things that they had seen and heard. Balaam could only say what God put in his mouth (**Numbers 22:38**). Naturally, I understand that our Heavenly king is perfect. Therefore, these earthly rights

that I value so much are not needed there. As one brother put it, "You can not improve on perfection."

One other problem I have found in my own life is that sometimes I want to mix what is right according to God with what I see as best politically for this nation. Sometimes these are two separate matters. When Thomas Jefferson penned the words that declared the United States to be a sovereign nation, he stated that God is the author of life. But are all the other rights that we enjoy as Americans specifically handed down to us by the word of God?

I read a comment on the internet a while back that said, "My God-given right to bear arms." Did that right come from God? Lest anyone misunderstand, I certainly appreciate the Second Amendment to our Constitution and hope that it remains and is upheld! Yet God gave the sword to government, not to his people (**Romans 13:4**). Jesus told Pilate that *"My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence"* (**John 18:36**).

The Declaration of Independence states that among our inalienable rights from our Creator are "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Again, I appreciate what the founders of this country did, but I have to ask: does freedom come from God? Jesus came to bring freedom from sin and death according to **Romans 8:2**, but He did not bring earthly political independence to the Jews from Rome. Some of the early church was made up of slaves who were told to be obedient to their masters (**Colossians 3:22**). I do not take this as a scriptural endorsement of slavery at all. While responsible earthly freedom is a noble idea that I support one hundred percent, what Jesus came to give us was a freedom so superior that it did not matter if you were an earthly slave or not.

We are told in **Acts 4:12** that *"there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."* I have always believed that there is no other God who can offer salvation, but now I am also reminded that anytime I put hope in men, a political movement, my native country, or any other earthly thing, it will only lead to disappointment. If, by some miracle, every candidate elected to political office next year had a biblical worldview, would that save our nation? No. In the words of John Adams, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

The only thing that will save this or any other nation is the message that God has left for us to spread: *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek"* (**Romans 1:16**). While I do love this earthly nation, and it does pain me to see it decline, if the fall of this nation helps to increase and strengthen the Kingdom of Heaven, should I not rejoice for that? If the country that once prided itself on promoting freedom of speech now tries to stifle the spreading of God's word, it will fail. We will have a scriptural reason to



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respectfully disobey the law if that happens, for then we can say like the apostles that *"we ought to obey God rather than men"* and continue to share his word (**Acts 5:29**). If the nation that once prided itself on promoting religious liberty begins to persecute those who faithfully follow Christ, in the words of a wise brother I admire, "Well that's what we signed up for" (see **2 Timothy 3:12**).

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Glory to God!

On May 27, the **Rock Creek Church of Christ, Ottawa, KS**, welcomed **Phyllis Snowden** as a new member. The brethren rejoiced a second time when **Kay Rhynerson** placed membership on May 30.

Here and There

The elders of the church in **Kirksville, MO** send the following request:

If you know of any students coming to **Truman State University**, please let the elders know: **Dan Green, 816-695-5201** or **Dean Hansen, 660-665-8298**. We provide help to move in on **August 18** and a **Progressive Dinner** on **August 20**. Classes begin on **August 23**.

Truman Student Welcome is **September 12** on the Square and **Back-to-Church Sunday** is the **19th**. We will have a booth on the square AND will have a common meal on the 19th after services that day.

Special Meetings

Kirksville Church of Christ

"Finding Your Vision to Serve," teacher: **Tad Morris**
Saturday, July 24 2:30-5:00 pm, (light meal and fellowship)

Sunday, July 25 10:00-12:00

Do you want to be great? Influential? Important? Jesus said, "Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant." It is counterintuitive, but it is true! The key to greatness is seeing ourselves as humble servants in the kingdom of Christ. Are you doing the work that God has called you to do? Are you fulfilling your potential? Do you still wonder what work God has planned for you? Do you have a vision to serve, but need some divine direction? This study will examine a Christian's duty to serve God, serve the church, and serve the community. We will discuss the qualities of an exceptional servant, and the obstacles that might prevent us from fulfilling our potential in God's service.

2021 Meetings

July 5-9.....Midwest Bible Campout, Eminence, MO
July 17.....Family VBS, Old Lamine, Rural Blackwater, MO
September 4-5.....Labor Day Meeting, Pleasant Hill, IA
September 18-19.....Brookfield, MO

The Gospel Message

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