

THE DOCTRINE OF ANGELS.

We are not to think that man is the highest form of created being. As the distance between man and the lower forms of life is filled with beings of various grades, so it is possible that between man and God there exist creatures of higher than human intelligence and power. Indeed, the existence of lesser deities in all heathen mythologies presumes the existence of a higher order of beings between God and man, superior to man and inferior to God. This possibility is turned into certainty by the express and explicit teaching of the Scriptures. It would be sad indeed if we should allow ourselves to be such victims of sense perception and so materialistic that we should refuse to believe in an order of spiritual beings simply because they were beyond our sight and touch. We should not thus shut ourselves out of a larger life. A so-called liberal faith may express unbelief in such beings. Does not such a faith (?) label itself narrow rather than liberal by such a refusal of faith? Does not a liberal faith mean a faith that believes *much*, not little—as much, not as little, as possible?

I. THEIR EXISTENCE.

1. THE TEACHING OF JESUS.

Matt. 18:10—"For I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." Mark 13:32—"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven." 8:38; Matt. 13:41; 26:53.

These are a sufficient number of passages, though they are by no means all, to prove that Jesus believed in the existence of angels. Jesus is not here speaking in any accommodative sense. Nor is He simply expressing a superstitious belief existing among the Jews at that time. This was not the habit of Jesus. He did not fail to correct popular opinion and tradition when it was wrong, e. g., His rebuke of the false ceremonialism of the Pharisees, and the

unbelief of the Sadducees in the resurrection. See also the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:20-37).

2. THE TEACHING OF PAUL, AND OTHER APOSTLES.

2 Thess. 1:7—"And to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels." Col. 2:18—"Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels." Is not one of the principal reasons for the writing of the Epistle to the Colossians to correct the gnostic theory of the worshipping of angels? See also Eph. 1:21, Col. 1:16. John believed in an angelic order of beings: John 1:51; Rev. 12:7; 22:9. Peter: 1 Pet. 3:22; 2 Pet. 2:11. See also Jude 9; Luke 22:43; Mark 8:38; Heb. 12:22. These and numerous other references in the Scriptures compel the candid student of the Word to believe in the existence of angels.

II. THE NATURE OF ANGELS.

1. THEY ARE CREATED BEINGS.

Col. 1:16—"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." Angels are not the spirits of the departed, nor are they glorified human beings (Heb. 12:22, 23). Neh. 9:6—"Thou, even thou, art Lord alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host."

2. THEY ARE SPIRITUAL BEINGS.

Heb. 1:14—"Are they not all ministering spirits?" Psal. 104:4—"Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire." It is thought by some that God creates angels for a certain purpose, and when that purpose is accomplished they pass out of existence. But that there are many, many angels in existence all the time is clear from the teaching of the Scriptures.

Although the angels are "spirits," they nevertheless oft-times have appeared to men in visible, and even human form (Gen. 19; Judges 2:1; 6:11-22, Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:26; John 20:12). There seems to be no sex among the angels, although wherever the word "angel" is used in the Scriptures it is always in the masculine form.

3. THEY ARE BEINGS OF GREAT MIGHT AND POWER.

2 Pet. 2:11—"Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might (than man)." Psa. 103:20—"Angels that excel in strength." One angel was able to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, and other guilty cities; one angel smote the first-born, and rolled away the great stone from the mouth of the tomb. One angel had power to lay hold of that old dragon, the devil (Rev. 20:2, 10); one angel smote a hundred and fourscore and five thousand Assyrians (Isa. 37:36). Their power is delegated; they are the angels of *His* might (2 Thess. 1:7), the ministers through whom God's might is manifested. They are mighty, but not almighty.

4. THERE ARE VARIOUS RANKS AND ORDERS OF ANGELS.

We read of Michael, the archangel (Jude 9; 1 Thess. 4:16); angels, authorities, and powers—which are supposedly ranks and orders of angels (1 Pet. 3:22; Col. 1:16). In the Apocryphal books we find a hierarchy with seven archangels, including Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel. The fact that but one archangel is mentioned in the Scriptures proves that its doctrine of angels was not derived, as some supposed, from Babylonian and Persian sources, for there we find seven archangels instead of one.

5. THE NUMBER OF ANGELS.

Heb. 12:22, R. V.—"Innumerable hosts of angels." Cf. 2 Kings 6:17; Matt. 26:53; Job 25:3.

III. THE FALL OF ANGELS.

Originally all angels were created good. The Scriptures speak of a fall of angels—"the angels that sinned."

2 Pet. 2:4—"For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." Jude 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."

1. THE TIME OF THE FALL OF ANGELS.

Some maintain that it took place before the creation recorded in Genesis 1:2—between verses one and two; that it was this fall which

made the original creation (Gen. 1:1) "waste and void." This view can neither be proven nor refuted, nevertheless the great and awful fact of a fall of angels remains. (See under Doctrine of Satan, p. 225, for fall of angels in connection with the fall of Satan.)

2. THE CAUSE OF THE FALL OF ANGELS.

Peter does not specify the sin. Jude says they "kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation." This, taken in connection with Deut. 32:8, which seems to indicate that certain territories or boundaries were appointed unto the angels, and Gen. 6:1-4, which speaks of the "sons of God" (which some suppose to refer to angels, which, however, is questionable), might seem to imply that the sin of the angels consisted in leaving their own abode and coming down to cohabit with the "daughters of men." Thus their sin would be that of lust. To some expositors the context in Jude would seem to warrant such a conclusion, inasmuch as reference is made to the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. But this can hardly be true, for a close study of the text in Genesis 6 shows that by "the sons of God" are meant the Sethites. This would seem to be the true interpretation; if so, then the sin recorded in Genesis 6 would be (1) natural and not monstrous; (2) Scriptural, and not mythical (cf. Num. 25; Judges 3:6; Rev. 2:14, 20-22 contains sins of a similar description); (3) accords with the designations subsequently given to the followers of God (Luke 3:38; Rom. 8:14; Gal. 3:26); (4) has a historical basis in the fact that Seth was regarded by his mother as a (the) son of from God, (5) in the circumstance that already the Sethites had begun to call themselves by the name of Jehovah (Gen. 4:26); (6), finally, it is sufficient as a hypothesis, and is therefore entitled to the preference (after Lange).

There are still others who say that the sin of the angels was pride and disobedience. It seems quite certain that these were the sins that caused Satan's downfall (Ezek. 28). If this be the true view then we are to understand the words, "estate" or "principality" as indicating that instead of being satisfied with the dignity once for all assigned to them under the Son of God, they aspired higher.

3. THE WORK OF FALLEN ANGELS.

They oppose God's purposes (Dan. 10:10-14); afflict God's people (Luke 13:16; Matt. 17:15, 16); execute Satan's purposes

(Matt. 25:41; 12:26, 27); hinder the spiritual life of God's people (Eph. 6:12); try to deceive God's people (1 Sam. 28:7-20).

4. THE JUDGMENT OF THE FALLEN ANGELS.

Jude 6; 2 Pet. 2:4; Matt. 25:41, show that there is no hope of their redemption. Their final doom will be in the eternal fire. According to 1 Cor. 6:3 it would seem as though the saints were to have some part in the judgment of fallen angels.

IV. THE WORK OF ANGELS.

1. THEIR HEAVENLY MINISTRY.

Isa. 6; Rev. 5:11, 12; 8:3, 4—priestly service and worship.

2. THEIR EARTHLY MINISTRY.

To the angels has been committed the administration of the affairs material to sense, e. g., showing Hagar a fountain; appearing before Joshua with a drawn sword; releasing the chains from Peter, and opening the prison doors; feeding, strengthening, and defending the children of God. To the Holy Spirit more particularly has been committed the task of imparting the truth concerning spiritual matters.

In general: Angels have a relation to the earth somewhat as follows: They are related to winds, fires, storms, pestilence (Psa. 103:20; 104:4; 1 Chron. 21:15, 16, 27). The nation of Israel has a special relationship to angels in the sense of angelic guardianship (Dan. 12:1; Ezek. 9:1; Dan. 11:1).

In particular: Angels have a special ministry with reference to the church of Jesus Christ—the body of believers. They are the saints' "ministering servants" (Heb. 1:14)—they do service for God's people. Illustrations: To Abraham (Gen. 19); to Gideon (Judg. 6); to Mary (Luke 1); to the shepherds (Luke 2); to Peter (Acts 12); to Paul (Acts 27).

a) They Guide the Believer.

They guide the worker to the sinner (Acts 8:26), and the sinner to the worker (Acts 10:3). Note: The angel guides, but the Spirit instructs (8:29). Are angels interested in conversions? (Luke 15:10). How they watch our dealing with the unsaved!

b) They Cheer and Strengthen God's People.

1 Kings 19:5-8; Matt. 4:11; Luke 22:43; cf. Acts 27:4-35; 5:19.

c) They Defend, Protect, and Deliver God's Servants.

Dan. 6:22; Acts 5:19; 2 Kings 6:18; Gen. 19:11; Acts 12:8-11; 27:23, 24.

d) They Are Eyewitnesses of the Church and the Believer.

1 Tim. 5:21—in matters of preaching, the service of the church, and soul-saving, the angels look on—a solemn and appalling thought. 1 Cor. 4:9—the good angels are spectators while the church engages in fierce battle with the hosts of sin. This is an incentive to endurance. 1 Cor. 11:10—"Because of the angels." Is there intimated here a lack of modesty on the part of the women so shocking to the angels, who veil their faces in the presence of God when they worship?

e) They Guard the Elect Dead.

Luke 16:22; Matt. 24:31. Just as they guarded Christ's tomb, and as Michael guarded Moses' tomb (Jude 9).

f) They Accompany Christ at His Second Coming.

Separating the righteous from the wicked (Matt. 25:31, 32; 2 Thess. 1:7, 8). Executing God's wrath upon the wicked (Matt. 13:39-42. R V. How this is done, no human pen can describe. The most fearful imagery of the Bible is connected with the judgment work of angels (cf. Revelation; fire, hail, blood, plague of locusts, poison of scorpions, etc.)—whether actual or symbolic, it is awful.