

### Thank God for His Angels!

A woman was driving alone on an isolated road when, suddenly, her car broke down. She didn't know very much about cars and so she did not know what the problem was, nor how to fix it. And she hadn't seen anyone on that road for a while. Nevertheless, a truck came down the highway and parked behind her on the side of the road. He got out of his truck and asked the woman what was wrong. She said, "My car broke down, and I don't know what to do." The man replied, "Relax, ma'am, I'm a mechanic. Let me see what I can do." So he went back to his truck, brought out his tools, opened the hood of the woman's car, and got to work. Within a few minutes, the mechanic got her car running as well as it did before it broke down. The woman thanked the mechanic and insisted that she pay him, but he wouldn't accept, and he walked back to his truck. The woman got the checkbook out of her car, but when she turned to find him, he was gone, along with his truck. The woman was convinced that the man who helped her that day was an angel.

Here's another story that one of my teachers told me: He was driving down an icy road one winter, and the sides of the already narrow street were lined with parked cars. Another car started coming down the same road toward him, and my teacher thought there was no way he wouldn't get into an accident here. But both cars slid by one another, not hitting each other nor any of the cars parked on that street. He described the experience as if there were angels moving the cars past each other as a child would with their toy cars.

You have probably heard many angel stories such as these. You might even have one of your own. Many people will scoff at stories like this, claiming that they're exaggerated or simply not true. Whether or not this is the case, we know that angels are real, and we hear that straight from the word of God. **And they are not simply family or friends who have died and now watch over their earthly family or friends, protecting them from physical harm.** Angels are God's servants. He created them separately from humans, and he uses them to accomplish his will. And a part of that will is keeping his earthly believers safe from both spiritual and physical harm. **We learn from our Old Testament lesson today that God's angels protected his people in the past, and they continue to protect us today.**

The king of Aram was furious. He gathered all his officers together and asked them, "Which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?" He was convinced that one of his officers was a traitor who gave information to the king of Israel. Aram was one of the kingdoms to the north of Israel, and the two were at war. The Arameans would send raiding parties into Israel to plunder their villages and gain a foothold in the war. And the king of Aram would only trust his officers with information about where he would set up camps to make these raids. But every time his army arrived to ambush an Israelite city, there was already a detachment of soldiers prepared to defend that city! He was so upset that he was ready to execute one of his most loyal men for treason.

One of his officers spoke up, however. He said, "None of us, my lord the king, but Israel has a prophet, Elisha. And he tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom." This was an exaggeration, a figure of speech. **But the point is God knows all things, and he knew Aram's plots.** In this way, the Lord would tell Elisha which city Aram was going to attack, and Elisha could tell the king of Israel so that he could guard that place. This information should have been enough to deter the king from making any more attacks against Israel. But in his rage and pride, he demanded that his men find out where the prophet was so that he could send men to capture him. When he learned that Elisha was in Dothan, he sent horses, chariots, and a great army there; much more than he would need to capture a single man.

The army traveled by night, and when they arrived at the city, they finally found it unprotected! So, they surrounded it and waited for the morning to attack. Elisha's servant woke up early that morning and saw the army of

Aram encamped around the entire city. And his heart sank. In despair, he ran back to Elisha and told him about all this, lamenting to him, “Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?” But Elisha seemed as calm as ever. He told his servant, “Don’t be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” The servant was puzzled about this. The king of Israel hadn’t sent any soldiers to protect the town. Who could Elisha be talking about?

Then Elisha prayed to God, and said, “Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see.” The Lord answered Elisha’s prayer, and he opened the servant’s eyes. We already know that the servant could see Aram’s armies, but he could not see God’s forces. In this way the servant’s eyes were opened, and he saw that the hills around Elisha were full of angels. One angel would have been enough to subdue the army of Aram; but there were horses and chariots of fire everywhere, ready to meet the horses and chariots of the king of Aram, who thought the prophet was unprotected.

This is just one of the stories that the Bible tells us about angels. There are multiple other accounts that show these immortal servants of God protecting mortal servants of God. For example, in Genesis God sends two angels to deliver Abraham’s nephew, Lot, and his family from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, after Abraham had interceded for the city. In the book of Daniel, we see that when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into a fiery furnace for not bowing down to the image of the Babylonian king, God saved them, and sent an angel to be with them as the flames failed to scorch them.

We even have some New Testament examples. An angel comes to Joseph in a dream, telling him to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt so that they may escape king Herod’s slaughter of children in Bethlehem. Angels attend to Jesus himself, both after he endures temptation from the devil and when he is distressed in the garden of Gethsemane. And again, when Peter is put in prison after Jesus has ascended into heaven, God sends an angel to break him out in a miraculous escape! However, none of these stories can quite compare to our account in 2 Kings, as legions of God’s army protect his servant, Elisha. **God, in his omniscience, knew that Aram was coming to capture Elisha. And in his love, he sent these invisible guardians to protect him, while the army of Aram thought he was unprotected.** While even just the presence of God would be enough to wipe out these mortal forces, God piles blessing upon blessing in protecting Elisha, his prophet, and completely surrounds him with his heavenly servants.

What comfort does this bring for us? We have a God who does not change, and so his love for us is the same as for his servants of old. And just as he protected them, he spares no expense in protecting us as well. Not only has he promised to always be with us, as written in Psalm 125:2, ‘As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people both now and forevermore.’ But God’s angels are still active in service today, protecting us from all sorts of threats. Psalm 34 relates, “The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.” And again, in Psalm 91, “He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” God heaps blessing upon blessing for us too. Martin Luther wrote this when he preached about angels: “It is a great comfort for all Christians to learn from these and other passages of Holy Scripture that they are not forsaken in the cross which they encounter in various forms throughout their lives. For they have the dear angels with them as protectors and guards. Furthermore, God is always present with his gifts, although one angel would really suffice to cope with all enemies.” In this way, God makes sure that we are protected and preserved during our time of grace here on earth.

But... why? Why does God treat his servants in this way? Why did God’s angels save Lot after he offered to give his daughters to a crowd of men to save his own skin? And why did he deliver Peter from prison after Peter had denied

Jesus three times in the temple courtyard? The three men in the fiery furnace weren't perfect, either. Why did God save them?

Why should God deliver us, then? What have you done to deserve protection by God's angels? A better question may be, what have we done to deserve God's wrath instead? God has also used his angels as servants of justice, and we have shown that we deserve death. Why should we not fear the angels around us? **The scriptures tell us that "there is no one who does good, not even one."** We are told to trust in the Lord above all things, but our trust is often put to the test. We constantly hear about different ways the Christian faith is under attack. There are those in the government who want to take away religious freedom, or who want to normalize the murder of unborn children. We are told by the media that we are evil bigots who stand against the freedom of love. And many Christians' lives are in danger, especially in other parts of the world where being a Christian is forbidden. In reaction to all this news, instead of putting our trust and hope in God, how often do we throw up our arms, and in despair mimic the words of Elisha's servant, "Alas! What shall we do?" Do we deserve protection from angels?

No, we don't.

But Jesus did. Jesus was the only one whose protection and attendance by angels was merited. We see this after he resisted Satan in the wilderness, and when he prayed to God in Gethsemane. And when the time came for him to be arrested, he told his disciples, "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" Indeed, the same angels who surrounded Elisha could have surrounded Jesus and easily thwarted his arrest. But he gave that up! He commanded his angels to stand aside so that he could be arrested, tried, and crucified. And he did that for you! **Through our works we certainly do not deserve the protection of angels. But Jesus' death paid for the shortcoming of our works and blotted out our sins.** So now when God looks at us, he does not see a sinner worthy of death; He sees a child of faith who needs to be protected. And he graciously grants that to us as well, by commanding his angels to guard us from the evil of the world and of the devil.

And now, through Jesus' resurrection, we too have the guarantee of eternal life. One day, our lives here will come to an end. That does not mean God's angels will have stopped protecting us; when God calls us home, we will need no more protection, for there is no evil in heaven. And there we will not only see the angels, but we will see our God, and we can join the Angels' song: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" Until that day, we can rest assured that we are protected always, and we can thank God for his angels. Amen.