

ANGELS: GOD'S AGENTS

Text: Hebrews 1:14

Belgic Confession Article 12

Readings: Revelation 5, Hebrews 1

Theme: Angels are sent by God as his servants to minister to us.

Purpose: To explain the help angels are to us and to show that Christ is far superior to them.

The Belgic Confession was written during the time of the Reformation in the 16th century. At that time there was a lot of interest in the spirit world – in fact, too much interest! People were very superstitious and there was a lot of talk about magic and witchcraft and a good deal of nonsense about angels.

When he wrote this article about the creation of all things Guido de Bres wanted to correct this superstition and to give a biblical explanation of who angels are and what they do.

In our Western world there is a growing interest in the spiritual world. This does not mean there is a growing interest in Christianity, but rather in astrology and witchcraft, mediums and exorcism, crystals and reincarnation. There is a great interest in evil spirits, but also in good spirits, in the angels. Some of this interest is generated by TV programmes and the movies of Hollywood. In the light of all this we need a biblical understanding of angels and the spirit world.

Guido de Bres described the creation and fall of the *evil angels* and how they are enemies of God and his church.

But he also described how God “created the *angels good* to be his messengers and to serve his elect”. He was referring to this verse in Hebrews chapter 1:14, “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”

We'll see that the good angels:

1. Are spirits
2. They are sent to serve us
3. They are servants of Christ

1. THEY ARE SPIRITS

a. That they are spirits means they do **not have a body**; they are invisible, but still real. You can't see sound waves or light waves but you know they are real and you believe in them. You can't usually see angels but they too are real.

Because they are spirits they are not limited by physical boundaries such as walls and doors, and they can move swiftly from one place to another.

They can also move between heaven and earth; they can be with God in heaven and then come to be with us on earth.

b. The angels were **created by God**. The Bible does not tell us *when* God created them.

In the book of Job the Lord tells us that when he laid the foundations of the earth “all the angels shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). This suggests that they were created before the creation of the heavens and the earth. They were there to rejoice in the world that God made.

c. Although they are spirits they can take on a **human form**.

Sometimes when they appeared to people they looked *so like humans* that people thought they were ordinary men, like the angels who came to visit Lot in the city of Sodom and those who visited Abraham at his tent in the desert.

At other times they took on a form that was *so glorious and splendid* that those who saw them were frightened of them, like the angels who appeared to the women at the tomb of Jesus after his resurrection.

d. A few other interesting facts about angels:

i. The Bible tells us that there are thousands and thousands of angels, 10,000 times 10,000 (Dan 7:10, Rev 5:11).

ii. The writer of Hebrews in chapter 2 quotes from Psalm 8 telling us that we have been made a little lower than the angels (Heb 2:7), but the book of Revelation tell us that one day, after the resurrection, we will be with them in heaven worshipping our God together.

iii. They don't know everything. The apostle Peter tells us that the angels longed to look into the things the prophets said about the sufferings of Christ and the glories that were to follow (1 Peter 1:12). Nor do they know when Jesus will return (Matt 24:36).

iv. They are not all powerful. Only God is almighty. His angels are created and are strong and powerful. They carry out God's will in this world but they are still limited in their power.

v. The Bible has a lot more to say about them but we aren't told everything we might like to know. We need to be careful that we don't speculate about them too much. Keep that in mind when you read novels about angels. People have all sorts of ideas and theories about angels but our knowledge must be based on what God has revealed in His word and not on our imagination or speculation.

2. They are sent to SERVE US:

They are "ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation."

Notice that they are "sent". The Greek word is 'apostello' which is the same root as the word used for apostle. It refers to someone who is sent out as an authoritative representative, a messenger, someone commissioned to do something. Jesus sends his angels out with his authority.

He sends them out to "serve". Here the word is the same as that used to describe deacons. Angels are sent to give help where it is needed, to provide comfort and encouragement.

They are sent to serve "those who will inherit salvation."

The word inherit refers to something that we will receive in the *future*.

But it also has the idea of *security*. There is an inheritance laid up for us which is definitely ours which we will receive when we die. No one can take it away. It is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit.

The inheritance is *salvation*, which is the final and full work of God for us. Those who trust in Jesus Christ have already been delivered from their sin and misery; they now enjoy peace with God; and one day in the future they will enjoy eternal life with him. Our inheritance is the fulfilment of our hope in heaven and our eternal fellowship with the triune God. This is where we are headed.

In the meantime the angels are sent to serve us; Jesus sends his angels to help us on our journey; they assist us until we arrive at our destination.

Let's consider two ways they do this.

a. They help in spreading the gospel

In biblical times angels were sometimes sent as messengers from God. That function is not necessary now because we have the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Now the message about Jesus is given to us and we are the ones who must proclaim it, but the angels help us with this. Luke mentions angels 21 times in the book of Acts.

An angel released the apostles from prison one night so they could go back to the temple and continue preaching about Jesus (5:17-19).

An angel rescued Peter from prison leading him through rows and rows of sleeping guards (12:1-11).

An angel told Phillip to go south to the desert road; there he met the Ethiopian Eunuch who came to believe in Jesus (8:26).

Again and again angels worked to help the spread of the gospel. They didn't proclaim the message themselves but they were there in the background constantly serving those who will inherit salvation, promoting the spread of the good news about Jesus.

That's a great encouragement to us today. We may not see these angels or realise their presence but they are there assisting us. That should be an added incentive in the work of evangelism. The good angels of God are on our side! They are helping us and working with us!

b. The angels are also helping us by guarding and protecting believers.

i. The Holy Spirit assures us of this in the Scriptures:

Ps 34:7, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him."

Ps 91:11-12, "For 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."

ii. Of course, God guards and protects us directly. He is almighty and all powerful and he can do this without their help. His care for us is sufficient, it is all we need. But in order to reinforce his care God assures us that he has sent his angels to watch over us; God has chosen to help us through them.

iii. This is a great comfort. You are not alone. Some of you children may be afraid of the dark; you are scared of getting out of bed at night. Remember that angels are watching over you. You may be travelling in a strange place and feeling lost and lonely. Remember that the angels of God are with you.

iv. We can illustrate this with many examples from the Bible.

Think of Hagar, Abraham's concubine, who was sent out with her son Ishmael into the desert; there an angels of God spoke to her to help her and her son and to reassure her.

When the prophet Elijah ran away from Jezebel an angel came and ministered to him and gave him food and drink.

v. There are many other examples in church history of the care and protection of angels over God's people.

John Paton was a missionary to the New Hebrides. One night natives surrounded his house intent on burning it down and killing him and those with him. The natives stayed there all night while Paton and his wife prayed. Then as the morning dawned they suddenly left.

Later the chief was converted and Paton asked him why he hadn't attacked the house. The chief replied, "Well you had all those men helping you." "What men?" Paton asked. The chief told him that surrounding the house there had been 100's of men in shining garments with drawn swords.

A similar experience occurred to Marie Monson, a Norwegian missionary serving in China. Looting soldiers surrounded the mission post and the missionaries waited for them to come storming in. But they never came. A few days later she heard that they had seen tall soldiers with shining faces standing on the rooftops of the compound.

Others have stories of how angels have helped them or people they know. All these remind us that angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation. They are always around us, even though we are usually not aware of their presence or their help.

vi. Of course, angels only appear visibly to people very occasionally, and they do not always protect God's people. Sometimes God allows terrible things to happen to believers. Sometimes Christians suffer great harm and pain and even death.

Yet even these terrible events are part of God's will. God is not helpless and his angels are not weak. For some reason God in his good and wise providence allows these things to happen. That is the subject of the next article in the Belgic Confession. We do not always understand God's providence, but we do know that the angels are with us as ministering spirits sent to serve us.

This brings us to the final point we need to consider.

3. They are SERVANTS OF CHRIST

While this verse teaches us an important truth it is, in a way, incidental to the main thrust of this passage. The primary focus of this chapter is on the **supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ**. The writer emphasises the greatness of the Lord Jesus and shows us that Jesus is superior to the angels.

Jesus is divine, they are his creatures.

He is the Son of God, they are his messengers.

He gives the commands, they do His will.

He is seated in heaven, they are sent to earth.

He is the Lord, they are his servants.

He is the one to be worshipped, they are the ones worshipping.

It would be a mistake to focus so much of the angels that we fail to see our Lord Jesus, to look so much at his messengers that we miss this vision of our glorious Lord.

Jesus is the focus of the Scriptures.

He is the One who fills the universe.

He is the First and the Last, the Son of God, the Lord of the universe, the King of creation.

Again and again in this chapter the writer draws a series of contrasts which highlight the majesty, glory and power of our Lord Jesus.

His throne will last forever and ever and righteousness will be the sceptre of His kingdom. He is the Captain of the armies of God, he is the Lord of Hosts.

Jesus is the one to be worshipped.

This is one of the great joys of the angels – to worship him who sits on the throne.

That must be our great joy as well.

One day we will be able to do this together. We will gather with the angels around the throne singing: "To him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be praise and honour and glory and power, forever and ever" (Rev 5:13).

Amen!