

Introduction to "Messengers"

Many subjects seem to defy simple definitions or descriptions. Once a study of these subjects begins, we usually notice that the words used in the description may be difficult to understand, or they may have more than one meaning. An example: If you were to study applications of the word WIND, would you be studying the weather or mechanics? Hopefully, the context of either storms or clocks would indicate which discipline to study. But the matter might be compounded to mention wind-driven generators or mills where both sciences are involved.

A study of Bible words often results in a similar investigation. We sometimes forget the rules as we attack the study with past beliefs guiding our efforts. We say, "study with an open mind," but the "I already know that" syndrome is still present. So, let us study with an open mind and explore the use and purpose of messengers, angels, apostles, and prophets. To begin, look at Hebrews 13:2, "*Do not neglect to show hospitality **to strangers**, for by this some have **entertained angels** without knowing it.*"

Most often, the mind goes straight to a heavenly being when the word "angel" appears in our English texts. Looking to scholars like Vincent, we learn that the word translated angel is, according to Strongs Greek reference number G 32, *Angelos*, which translates to "a messenger." The messenger can receive a message from God, man, or Satan. The context of the Hebrew letter states in Hebrews 1:2 that any message received today is from Christ Jesus. Therefore, we can eliminate man and Satan as the source of the messenger in Hebrews 13:2.

Next question: What kind of messenger did Christ use in the early church? For this answer, we must look to passages after Acts 2.

To spread the gospel, The Lord sent a heavenly being to tell a preacher to go to someone, and another time to tell one seeking God to send for a preacher. The angel told Philip to go. "*But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, 'Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza'*" (Acts 8:26). The angel told Cornelius to send. "*About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, 'Cornelius!'... 'Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter'*" (Acts 10:3-8). The unique truth found when heavenly angels appeared is that the heavenly messenger could not preach and teach the plan of salvation to men. Humans taught humans in every instance recorded in scripture. Even Jesus did not tell Paul what he must do but sent him to Ananias to learn the truth (Acts 9:1-6).

The involvement of the heavenly host was to assist the spread of the gospel, not to teach it. Note the action of an Angel when the apostles were in prison in Acts 12. Herod Agrippa I, put James in prison and had him killed. To further please the Jews, the king arrested Peter and kept him under heavy guard. Jesus had determined to use Peter to preach the first sermon to the gentiles and, therefore, sent a heavenly messenger to release Peter (Acts 12:1-9). "*When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. When Peter came to himself, he said, 'Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting'*" (Acts 12:10-11). In this case, the power of the heavenly being overcame the guard and prison.

During the great storm that threatened the ship taking Paul toward Italy, a heavenly messenger appeared to Paul as the crew lost all hope of survival. Paul told the crew, *"This very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you'"* (Acts 27:23-24). Jesus told Paul that he would preach to Kings. Therefore, He sent an angel, heavenly messenger, to Paul as a help to encourage the crew.

These examples help us understand the rhetorical question in Hebrews 1:14. *"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?"* They are ministering servants instead of the messengers they had been in the Old Testament years and announcing Jesus' birth. The heavenly messengers only appear to encourage Jesus before His death, give directions to the disciples at His resurrection and ascension, and aid the apostles as they spread the gospel.

Other uses of the Greek word Angelos and all the messengers used by God and His Christ will be discussed in future blogs.