

Gen 28:10-17, Rev 12:7-12, Ps 103 19-end, John 1:47-end.

The first poem I can remember learning was a little night time prayer that I was taught as a child.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

Bless the bed that I lay on.

Four corners to my bed,

five angels there lie spread,

Two at my head, two at my feet

one at my heart my soul to keep.

Do Angels play any part in our world today?

I have not found any guarantees of five angels to every child's bed in scripture. But Angels are part of the world that The Lord our God has made.

There are 300 references to Angels in the Bible. In both the OT and NT Angels played an important role in God's reaching out to and in protecting God's people.

Angels are powerful spiritual beings, created by God to do His will. They were created with free will to love and to serve God. Ps 103:20f

"Praise the Lord you his angels, you mighty ones who do His bidding. Praise the Lord all His heavenly hosts, you his servants who do His will."

Hebrews [1:14] calls the angels **"ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation."**

But some of the angels, possibly about one third [Revelation 12:4], chose to use their free will to follow Satan, the Dragon, in rebellion against the Lord our God. We are not given a lot of detail of the war in heaven in Scripture.

Today's reading from Revelation [12:7-12] gives us a summary of what happened.

Michael, the archangel [Jude 9], and his angels threw the rebels out of heaven. The great dragon, the ancient serpent was hurled down to earth with those angels who had followed him.

The word Satan is from a Hebrew word and Devil is from a Greek word. Both mean accuser. We see Satan at work as the accuser in the beginning of the book of Job [Job 1:7-12].

The war is ongoing. God's will is still not done on earth as it is in heaven. Behind many of the centres of power in our world in politics, industry, commerce, social attitudes and false religions are dark forces which are pleased to lend their power to those who will work against the coming of the Kingdom of God. The human beings involved may not be aware of it

but selfish ambition, lust for power and prestige leave anyone open to be used by our enemy.

Satan even tempted Jesus to try to establish God's Kingdom with the world's means. Satan showed Jesus all the Kingdoms of the world and said to Jesus **"All this I will give to you if you bow down and worship me"** [Matthew 4:9].

We are not given many details of how this works out? In Daniel [10:12-13] an angel came to Daniel who has been praying and fasting. The Angel was sent by God in answer to Daniel's prayer for understanding. The Angel explained that he had been delayed for three weeks by the spiritual forces behind the King of Persia. The Archangel Michael who had special responsibility to care for God's people had come to help him [Daniel 12:1] so he could get through with God's revelation.

Genesis 19 tells the dramatic story of how two Angels were sent to rescue Abraham's nephew Lot and his family from Sodom before it was destroyed. Later Jacob, Abraham's grandson, was leaving the Promised Land to go to Haran to find a wife [Genesis 28:10-17]. One night on the journey Jacob slept under the stars about 12 miles north of Jerusalem.

As he slept he saw in a dream a **"stairway resting on the earth with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it."** There above it stood the Lord and He spoke:

"I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you & your descendants the land on which you are lying... I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land."

When Jacob woke up he realized that he had seen a vision of Angels and of God. Therefore he set up a stone pillar and anointed it with oil. He called that place Bethel, "The house of God".

I see links with our Gospel reading [John 1:47-end]. Philip one of Jesus' first disciples told his friend Nathaniel that they had found the promised Messiah. But Nathaniel was sceptical when he heard that Jesus came from Nazareth. Nazareth was only a small town of about 2,000 people at that time and had never been mentioned in any of the Old Testament Documents. But when Nathaniel came to Jesus he was greeted with the words, **"Here is a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false."**

This must have rung true to Nathaniel but he was puzzled and he asked, **"How do you know me?"** Jesus answered, **"I saw you while you were still under the fig tree."** We are not given the details of what Jesus saw but it was clear to Nathaniel that Jesus had significant supernatural knowledge. Nathaniel responded in a dramatic way. **"Rabbi you are the Son of God, the King of Israel"**. Jacob - who was the first Israelite - had seen "the angels of God ascending and descending showing that the place he had slept was the "House of God". Jesus promised Nathaniel that he would see heaven open and "the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man". Isn't that significant

Jesus was claiming to be the new Bethel, the House of God. Where Jesus is there God will be revealed. Jesus is the new way of coming to God.

An angel kept Daniel safe in the Lion's den [Daniel 6:22]. An angel rescued Daniel's three friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and protect them in the fiery furnace [Daniel 3:25].

In the NT we meet other Angels. John the Baptist's father Zechariah saw the Angel Gabriel in the Jerusalem Temple who gave him the

promise of an answer to his prayers. His wife was to have a son who he would call John who would be the one to be the forerunner of the Messiah [Luke 1:5-25]

Six months later Gabriel was also sent to Nazareth in Galilee to tell the Virgin Mary that she would be the mother of the Saviour [Luke 1:26-38]. Angels announced the birth of the saviour to the Shepherds on the hillside [Luke 2:8-14].

**"Glory to God in the highest,
and peace on earth
to men on whom his favour rests."**

Joseph was warned by an angel in a dream to take the baby Jesus and escape to Egypt because the child's life was in danger [Matthew 2:13-15].

We don't know the names of many of the angels though there was a lot of speculation about angels amongst Jews in the first century. Some Jewish groups had lists of Hierarchies of Angels. They claimed secret knowledge of the workings of heaven which could be manipulated to the advantage of those in the know.

The NT avoids that kind of speculation. St Paul warned his churches against those who advocated "asceticism and the worship of angels" [Colossians 2:18 ESV].

These secrets were not the kind of knowledge that the congregations needed to live the Christian life.

We are not told to look out for angels or to pray to them. Jesus taught us to pray direct to the Father. We have direct access to the King our creator God. When we pray to our Father in Heaven "deliver us from evil" the Lord our God hears our prayer and directs his angels as he wills.

In a time of persecution when James the brother of John was arrested and executed by Herod the believers prayed for Peter who had also been arrested. Our heavenly Father sent an angel to him in prison and rescued him.

I read a story about missionaries in China at the beginning of 20th who were travelling through Bandit country to reach an isolated ethnic group who had not yet heard the Gospel. They knew that they were taking a risk but there was no other way so they prayed for God's protection and set off. During the day they sensed that people were following them and were anxious at night as they set up camp. They were relieved and thankful in the morning when they were able to continue safely to their destination.

Later one of the bandits who had been following them became a Christian. He told the missionaries that the bandit group had planned to attack them at night but when they approached they were surprised to find the little group of travellers surrounded by soldiers in white uniforms. So they abandoned their attack.

The missionaries had asked for God's protection and thanked him for a safe journey but had been unaware how the Lord our God answered their prayer with army of angels.

We may be having more contact with angels than we are aware of. I think of times in my life when I have been saved from danger. The Lord answered our prayers. We may never know how many times we have been rescued from disaster through God's loving use of his Angels?

When we experience God's goodness in this life;
When see how we have been kept safe in the circumstances of life it is to our Heavenly Father we give thank and praise. It is good to live thankfully each day.

When our hearts are full of praise we are joining with the song of Millions of angels;

**Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.**

The unseen spiritual battle is still going on between the forces that resist God's will and those who want to build the Kingdom of God. St Paul wrote to the Corinthian church [2 Corinthians 10:3,4]

"We are not waging war according to the flesh.

**For the weapons of our warfare are not
of the flesh but have divine power."**

We are like foot soldiers we don't need to know all the workings of the battle.

We have our orders;

**Love the Lord your God with all your heart,
Love your neighbour as yourself.**

When we draw close to God in worship, in confession and prayer we show our love for God.

When we do the things we know are right in obedience to God's word and love our neighbour as ourselves we are soldiers of the cross.

**Each time we choose to do the right thing we are
winning battles in the unseen spiritual sphere**

Jesus sent out 72 disciples to announce the coming of the Kingdom of God. They came back to Jesus full of joy that even the demons submitted to them [Luke 10:17-20] Jesus replied;

"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven..."

Was this a vision of something Jesus had seen happening in the spiritual realm. His disciples had gone out in the authority that Jesus had given them and had seen great results.

What will the Lord do in the spiritual realm as we are faithful to the calling the Lord our God lays on our lives?

There may also be a gentle warning against pride. Because it was pride which led to Satan's downfall. Our Lord does not want us to become proud in the ministries he gives us.

Jesus adds a word of perspective for his exited disciples;

**"Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you,
but rejoice that
your names are written in heaven."**

Prayer

**Father God we thank you that
in your loving care you have guided
and protected us throughout our lives.**

**We praise and thank You that
You are able to deliver us from evil in this life
and to present us faultless in the next
through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen**