



Minutes With Messiah

Volume 1, Issue 9

Web site: members.aol.com/tjohearn

July 2000

The Next Step

“Why can’t he just take the next step?” A prominent member of the Jewish *P’rushim*, the Pharisees, was talking to a friend about a potential convert. “He is so close to believing the truth. He knows the scriptures; maybe even better than I do. We agree on almost everything. But he just won’t take that next step. He just won’t accept the Oral Law.”

In our world that last phrase might be heard variously. “He just won’t accept the authority of the Pope.” Or maybe, “that baptism is just the outward sign of an inward change,” or “baptism of newborns,” or “that Jesus could have come and preached to the Native Americans,” or (I’ve even heard) “that the King James Version of the Bible is the original, accurate, and infallible text.” He/she just can’t accept those things I believe in that can’t be found written by God, but are so much a part of the way I worship God.

Our hypothetical Pharisee knew his potential convert was a righteous Jew. In fact, except on a few major (well, maybe even minor) points, he was a Pharisee. No one kept the written law as faithfully. He just wouldn’t follow the traditions of the fathers as law.

If he could take that one step, how many others would come into the fold? “If he could take that next step, maybe those traitors, those Greek philosophy spouting Sadducees would finally have to listen to the ‘holy ones’ for once.”

What really scared our friend, the Pharisee, though, was not that he couldn’t quite convert the man. It was that the man, Jesus of Nazareth, was going around showing people how to be good Jews without being Pharisees. In this Pharisee’s mind there were only two groups—Pharisees, and everyone else. They were the Pharisees—the “holy ones”—the keepers of what had been Judaism for

centuries. The Essenes were a bunch of crackpots living where nothing lived, by the Dead Sea. The Zealots were just a political group and included Pharisees and others. The Sadducees were Jews who had never come back from Greek ways after the Maccabees kicked Antiochus out. The Herodians, another purely political group, didn’t care about religion as long as the descendants of that Edomite were on the throne, against all scriptural ordinances. The only pure ones were the Pharisees. Now there were these Jeshuites (for want of a better term) who claimed purity, but wouldn’t take the next step. Even some Pharisees were listening to Him.

There was one Pharisee who later saw that he could still be a Pharisee and believe this Jesus was Messiah. (Phi 3:5) It wasn’t that Jesus should have taken that next step. It was that the *P’rushim* needed to take the next step—a backward one. Jesus didn’t need to accept the oral law; the Pharisees needed to reject it as law. Not necessarily as practice, just as law. They needed to reject “teaching as doctrine the commandments of men.” (Matt 15:5)

Did our hypothetical Pharisee ever see that truth? I don’t know. Maybe he did. Maybe his name was Saul of Tarsus. Can anyone else see that truth? Maybe. Maybe his/her name is **[insert your name here]**.

Contents

The Next Step	1
Angels In Disguise	2
Musings	4

All articles Copyright 2000 by Tim O’Hearn unless otherwise noted.

Angels In Disguise

He was a rich man who gave most of what he had to the poor before he died. He spent all his time doing good deeds for others. He must have been an angel in disguise.

That is a summary of a song I heard recently. I think it is also a summary of many people's misconception of the nature and work of angels. Regardless of what anyone may think of the theology of Della Reese, she at least seems to understand better than this the biblical nature of angels. On her TV show, *Touched By an Angel*, very rarely do the angels do things "for" people; rather they tell things "to" people.

In all of scripture there may be only one instance of angels providing food or other physical things for anyone. That is in I Kings 19, when twice an angel woke Elijah to tell him to eat before taking a long journey. It is assumed the angel provided the food that Elijah found there. Beyond that, the only other possible time that angels provided for someone was when, after the temptation of Christ, Matthew and Mark say the angels "ministered to him." (Mt 4:11; Mk 1:13) What the nature of that ministry was is open to speculation. Did they provide food, or just a word of comfort? I don't know.

All the other scriptures that describe the work of angels can be divided into two or three categories:

There is a distinct lack of action in God's heavenly army.

delivering messages, fighting for God, and delivering God's prophets from harm. These latter two divisions may even be considered one.

Angels as Deliverers

This is probably the least documented of the works of angels. The first recorded instance (saving

Lot from the men of Sodom in Genesis 19) seems to be only incidental to their real purpose, delivering God's warning to him. The only other Old Testament instance of this phenomenon is in Daniel 6:22, where an angel shut the mouths of the lions. In the New Covenant we find an angel delivering the apostles in Acts 5:19, and Peter in Acts 12:7-10. In the first two of these three instances the clear purpose of the angelic assistance was to prove to others (the king/the Sanhedrin) that the men delivered were God's men. In the example of Peter, however, the deliverance appears to have had the sole purpose of preventing his death the next day. All of these events could even be said to be among the times that angels fought for God.

Angels as God's Army

This is, to me, a really interesting aspect of the work of angels—not because I am so military minded, but because of the distinct lack of action in God's heavenly army. From the beginning of time until now, the angelic host has made appearances. In that same time there is practically no evidence of their actually fighting. An angelic guard was put on Eden after the fall of man, but nobody appears to have ever challenged that guard. A single "angel of the Lord" caused the death of Herod because of blasphemy in Acts 12:23. In 2 Kings 19:35 (also 2 Chron 32:21 and Isa 37:36) a single "angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses." The hosts of angels appear on occasion, but it seems their presence alone is enough to allow the earthly armies of God to gain the victory. This is understandable, when a single angel was able to effect the slaughters mentioned above.

One of the notable examples of this is found in 2 Kings 6. The king of Syria had sent an entire army to find Elisha and prevent him from telling the king of Israel the Syrian movements. The young man who served Elisha saw the Syrian army and was

afraid. The account proceeds in verses 17 and 18: “And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.” I am presuming the horses and chariots were manned by the angelic hosts. Even in this case, however, it is not the angels to do the smiting, but God Himself, at Elisha’s request.

This will not forever be the state of affairs, however. There will be a time when all the angels will be directly involved with the affairs of men on God’s behalf, but it will not be a pleasant time for most. “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” (Mt 13:41-42) “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (Mt 24:31) It seems that the primary function of the angels as God’s army will be carried out at the gathering for judgement.

Angels as God’s Messengers

In the early part of the American Civil War, the Union cavalry’s main function was to guard the camps and to carry dispatches. After General Sheridan took over, the cavalry became a major fighting force. So it will be with the angels. Before now their primary function has been as guards and messengers. They may on occasion open locks or slay armies, but mostly they delivered messages for God. After the coming again of the Messiah they will begin taking a more active part in the war, in the gathering and punishment of souls.

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.” (He 1:1-2) Among the various manners God used to speak to the fathers was the use of angels. Space does not allow me to cite all the

sundry times God spoke through angels. To establish the point I will mention only a few.

In Genesis 16, an angel appears to Hagar and delivered a message. Three chapters later, angels warn of the doom of Sodom. Angels appear to deliver messages to Balaam (Nu 22:31), to Joshua (Jos 5:15), to Gideon (Jud 6:11-22), to Manoah and his wife (parents of Samson) (Jud 13), to Daniel (Dan 8:16-17; 9:21), and to Zechariah (Zech 1:9). Perhaps the best known angelic visitations are those to Zacharias announcing the birth of John (Luke 1:11) and to Mary announcing the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:28). They also appeared to the women at Jesus’s tomb, after the resurrection (Matt 28:5-7),

By far, the instances of angels as messengers outweigh the cases where they did anything else.

and the apostles at the ascension (Acts 1:10-11). They delivered messages to Philip (Acts 8:26), to Cornelius (Acts 10), and to Paul (Acts 27:23-24). On the island of Patmos, about five miles off the Ephesian coast, John received a series of messages from angels which he recorded in what we call the Book of the Revelation. By far, the instances of angels as messengers outweigh the cases where they did anything else. The passage in Hebrews 1:1 seems to indicate, however, that even this is no longer a function of angels, television dramas notwithstanding.

There are many things we don’t understand about angels. This seems to be certain, though. A person going around doing good deeds is probably not an “angel in disguise” as much as he may be an “Abraham in disguise.” (Heb 13:2)

Musings

“Hi. My name is Tim, and I’m a chocaholic.”

When I get a box of chocolates, I don’t have to hide it. The only reason for this is that I’m the only one in the house that eats chocolate. If somebody comes visiting, however, I may have to rush to hide the chocolates before opening the door, just in case. Chocolate is the most important of the major food groups. Therefore, it is something to be hoarded, hidden, held. Gold is not that important. The Midas touch was nothing. Now, if he had been able to turn things to chocolate instead of gold... God’s grace is not a box of chocolates. Instead, it is a sunset. Nobody can look at a sunset and stay quiet. It’s automatic that you turn to the nearest person and say, “Look at that!” Grace should be even more automatic. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” (Ro 1:16)

Why is it that people who will not bet two dollars on a horse at 30-1 odds will bet their souls that all that now exists is the result of random chance at more than 2 billion-1 odds?

The ad for a local casino says, “You play. You win. It’s fun. Come on in.” Where is truth in advertising? Probably fewer people would go there if they presented their product truthfully: “You play. You lose. No fun. Sing the blues.”

Timothy J. O’Hearn
737 Monell Dr NE
Albuquerque NM 87123

In the early days of air shows, when aircraft speeds were much slower, one of the favorite attractions was the “wing-walker,” someone who stood on the wings of the plane as it flew. Who was the original wing-walker? It was God. “Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind.” (Ps 104:3)

With the popularity of a particular game show on TV, the phrase “Is that your final answer?” has entered the American consciousness. God, on the other hand, is not playing a game. Everyone is playing for much more than being a millionaire. So, how many lives would change if, just before they were to die, God asked, “Is that your final answer?”

Website Update

I have made some changes to my website.

A subject index of past articles from this bulletin is now available in addition to the index by date. All articles beginning with the first issue are available on the site.

My site also now has a new feature: What Does the Bible Say About...? I will send an e-mail answer to biblical questions submitted by filling out a form on my site.

<http://members.aol.com/tjohearn>