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GUARDIAN ANGELS

Angelology can be a fascinating study. The problem is, it raises more questions than it gives answers. In the Middle Ages the question arose, "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?" While that question appears to most to be absurd, others debate the hierarchy of angels (Seraphim, Cherubim, Archangels, Angels, etc.). Some debate whether angels have gender. Still others wonder about the permanence of angels; are they created at a specific time for a specific purpose and then cease to exist. And of course, there are all sorts of speculations about the devil and his angels, and whether or not they ever existed in heaven.

Then there is the question of guardian angels, which subdivides into individual guardians for children or for everyone, and guardians for specific nations. It is that last idle speculation to which this article will be dedicated.

David was the first to propose the idea of guardian angels. His concept, though, was guardians of the Messiah to come.

There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. (Ps 91:10-13)

The devil tried to use this idea of protecting angels when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. He took Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple and proposed that if he be the Son of God he should jump. As justification he used this passage from the Psalms. (Matt 4:6) Jesus, without acknowledging whether he had guardian angels or not, said "You shall not tempt the Lord thy God."

Jesus does seem to advocate for the idea of individual guardian angels. At least, he proposes that children have their own angels. Whether that continues into adulthood is unstated.

Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. (Matt 18:10)

The word we transliterate as angels is properly translated messenger. Do the angels of the little ones

protect them, or merely inform God about their condition? Jesus does not expand on the thought.

In like manner, John is told that churches have angels. (Rev 1:20 and following chapters) Since the translators of the King James Version chose to use the term angels, most people believe that each congregation has its own guardian angel. On the other hand, it could simply be that the letter of chapters 2 and 3 were written to the human messengers (preachers) of the churches. If that were so, however, it is more likely that he would have used the related word, evangelist (which contains the word angel).

And what about nations? Do they have their own angels? A reading of the book of Daniel indicates this to be true, although he uses the word Princes instead of Angels. In Daniel 10, Gabriel (who is identified as an angel), says that he was opposed by "the Prince of Persia," but assisted by "Michael, your prince." He then announces that he must go back to fight the Prince of Persia, but that the Prince of Greece is about to come. (Dan 10:20) If we assume that these princes are guardian angels of the nations, then we must also believe that some of them are good and some evil. That, then, raises the question of how an angel (of God or the devil) becomes a guardian angel, and if there are evil guardians of the nations, then are there evil guardians of children as well?

Oh, the tangled webs! Are there guardian angels? Whom do they guard and where do they come from? We have to admit that we just do not have sufficient information. There are hints in the scriptures, but they do as much to conceal as to reveal. In the end, we must figure that if God wanted us to know the details, He would have told us more clearly. Absent such details, angelology remains a speculative discussion.

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FORTY DAYS

Numerology is a popular pseudoscience. You can purchase books that will tell you, based on numerical equivalents to the letters in your name, what your personality or your fortune will be. One of the faults of this system is that your number may differ depending on whether you use your full name, your first or middle and last name, a shortened version of your name, or your initials and last name. Of course, some advocates would say that the point is that you can change your fortune by changing how you call yourself. A simple change can make you less lazy or more talented. People have been trying to apply various forms of numerology to the Bible for centuries.

Biblical systems of assigning numbers to words is often called *gematria*. The *gematria* of a word may be based on the numerical equivalents of the letters in the word or on a numerical equivalent of the spelling of the letters in the word, or even the numerical equivalent of the opposite letter in alphabetical order. In other words, there is no standard system, although assigning digits, tens, and

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hundreds to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet is the most common. In Kabbalistic literature, words with the same value may be considered related. Thus, the king of Sheshak (Jer 25:26) may be a reference to the king of Babylon, because their *gematria* is the same.

Perhaps the most famous example of numerology in the Bible is found in the Revelation. "Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six." (Rev 13:18) In Greek that may equate to "Nero Caesar." Or it may not. First century Christians would understand, but we don't today.

Other people assign special significance to numbers. For instance, three is the number of deity and seven is the number of completeness, even though there is little evidence in the Bible for such assignment. A more common use of a symbolic number would be twelve.

Because there were twelve tribes of Israel and twelve apostles, the number of the gates of the New Jerusalem in the Revelation was twelve. (Rev 21:12, 14) There is one other number, though, that seems to be more significant than any of these, based on its frequency in scripture, and yet it is usually not given a numerological significance. That is the number forty. More specifically, forty days.

Noah

Forty days in a boat in a rainstorm. (Gen 7) Two or three days of feeling queasy is quite enough. Forty days would be almost unbearable. Trying to sleep in a storm-tossed ship is not an easy proposition. Just as you decide to sleep in line with the bow and stern, the storm shifts and the only comfortable way to sleep is across the ship. And then Noah had to deal with all those seasick animals.

Noah was the first to deal with a forty-day period. And that was just the beginning. After the storm, he still stayed onboard until a whole year had expired. Noah had set the standard for others to follow.

Jacob and Jonah

These two could be considered the participants in minor forty-day periods. One was dead, and the other was just sitting around waiting.

In America, the death of a president begins a mourning period of thirty days. Not so with the Egyptians. Joseph was the second in power in the kingdom, so when his father died there was a typical Egyptian period of mourning.

And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father: and the physicians embalmed Israel. And forty days were fulfilled for him; for so are fulfilled the days of those which are embalmed: and the Egyptians mourned for him threescore and ten days. (Gen 50:2-3)

Seventy days of mourning. But it all began with forty days for embalming. Forty days of the body being covered with natron salts, changed at least three times, the body cavity stuffed with sawdust, and then wrapped in resin-coated linen. It was a process perfected over centuries, and forty days was found to be the ideal time for mummification.

Jonah, on the other hand, was very much alive for his forty-day ordeal. He had preached his one-sentence prophecy to Nineveh: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." (Jon 3:4) So he sat down to wait. He very much wanted to witness the destruction, just as he had probably witnessed his own land being attacked by these

people. But the people of Nineveh repented, and all Jonah got out of it was a case of heat stroke.

The Moses Diet

If Noah is to be commended for enduring a forty-day storm, Moses takes the prize for consecutive periods of that length. At least Noah had his family with him. Moses spent four months away from his people, and most of it without food or water.

First he went up on Mount Sinai to receive the tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments and the pattern for the Tabernacle. (Ex 24:18) When he came down from the mountain the people had made the golden calf. He broke the tablets, destroyed the calf, and then began his second forty-day period.

And I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and forty nights: I did neither eat bread, nor drink water, because of all your sins which ye sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. (Deut 9:18)

After praying for the designated period, Moses went back up on the mountain for—you guessed it—forty more days, likewise without bread or water. (Ex 34:28) If anyone proposes that you take the Moses diet, decline.

Nevertheless, there were two people who did at least one-third of the Moses diet. Instead of three consecutive periods, they went for just one.

Elijah had just won a victory over the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. Queen Jezebel was searching for him to kill him. He despaired of his life, but an angel woke him twice and told him to eat a meal. “And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.” (1 Kings 19:8) After this forty days he received a message of encouragement from God and returned to Israel.

Jesus had been immersed by John in the Jordan River. He had heard God’s approval. In that triumph he went into the wilderness and fasted forty days. (Matt/Lk 4) Moses talked to God after forty days of fasting. God talked to Elijah after his forty-day fast. What did Jesus get? He got tempted by the devil. That’s not how the Moses Diet was supposed to work. Nevertheless, he answered the devil with scripture and resisted the temptation.

Miscellaneous Forties

Forty days becomes forty years. Sounds fair, right? When Israel approached the promised land, Moses sent men to spy out the territory. They spent forty days in their reconnaissance. (Num 13) They came back praising the land that God was going to give them. But. There is always a but. Twelve of the spies focused on the giants in the land and said that Israel could not conquer them. Two spies said that they could win with the Lord’s help. The

people listened to the majority. That was when God sentenced them to forty years in the wilderness, a year for a day, until that generation died out.

Can you cower in fear for forty days? Some people probably exceed that. The Israelite army had to endure forty days of fear. That is the number of days that Goliath came out daily to challenge the army to pick a champion to face him. After that period, David took up the challenge and the rest, as they say, is history. They had spent forty days in fear, when trust in God would have solved the problem immediately. Have we learned that lesson yet?

The average young person changes position in their sleep five times in a night. The body needs to relieve pressure on the muscles, so we turn over or stretch out. If you

Moses talked to God after forty days of fasting. God talked to Elijah after his forty-day fast. What did Jesus get?

have ever lain on your side until you were in pain, you can sympathize with poor Ezekiel. First God told him to lie on his left side for over a year. Then he said, “And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days.” (Ezek 4:6) In all those days he was not allowed to turn from one side to the other. The pain he was sure to have felt was prophetic of the troubles to come on Israel and Judah. Are you sure you want to be a prophet? Maybe not, if it involves what Ezekiel had to bear.

Pentecost comes fifty days (or more, depending on whose interpretation you use) after Passover. Jesus was crucified at Passover and rose three days later. He appeared to the apostles for the next forty days (Acts 1:3), teaching them everything they would need to know before the Holy Spirit came on them with power. At least during this forty-day period he was allowed to eat. After that forty days Jesus ascended to heaven and the apostles went back to Jerusalem to wait. Nor did they have to wait long; only about a week. Imagine what things Jesus had to tell them during that forty days!

Twelve separate periods of forty days. If you believe the numerology, it is probably significant that there were twelve such periods. Even if you don’t, it appears that there may have been some significance to forty days (and sometimes nights). Whether it means anything to us today or not is hard to say. Nevertheless, forty seems to be the most significant number in the Bible.

THERE WAS A HISTORY

Sometimes we look at things as if they happen independently of anything else, like in a bubble. For instance, Americans think of the War of 1812 as a conflict between Britain and the recently-formed United States. Usually it is only the historians that look at it as part of the larger global conflict of the Napoleonic Wars. We might listen to Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* on the Fourth of July as a rousing background for cannon fire and fireworks. We don't usually make the jump to the realization that the conflict in Russia commemorated by that work and the conflict between Great Britain and the United States were related. (The War of 1812 was fought because the British were impressing Americans into their navies in order to help them fight Napoleon.) We look at the American bubble only. Sometimes we are the same way with incidents in the Bible.

One particular incident stands out. We look at David's affair with Bathsheba in a bubble, when there was probably much more to it.

And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house. And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child. (2 Sam 11)

When David found out about her pregnancy, he essentially murdered her husband. Uriah was, after all, a

Hittite and not an Israelite. He then marries Bathsheba. The child dies, but a subsequent child, Solomon, becomes the next and greatest King of Israel.

That is the bubble we see. But there was probably more to it than this. This passage makes it look like David did not know who she was. But how could he not know? He had probably met her frequently at state dinners or other social events. Just look at her pedigree.

Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Uriah was one of David's "Mighty Men." (2 Sam 23:39; 1 Chron 11:41) These were not mere soldiers; they were special forces. It is not inconceivable that David socialized with these men and their wives.

But it goes beyond that. Bathsheba was the daughter of Eliam, probably by a wife named Sheba. (Bathsheba translates as the daughter of Sheba.) Eliam, also one of the Mighty Men, was the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite. (2 Sam 23:34) This Ahithophel was one of David's counselors, whose counsel "was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God." (2 Sam 16:23) As the granddaughter of a chief counselor, she was probably known to David from her childhood. When David saw her bathing next door he may not have realized that this was "little Bathsheba" all grown up.

David probably knew Bathsheba as a child. He may have known her as an adult, married to one of his generals. The lust he felt for her in this incident may have been growing for some time.

Sin can sneak up on us like that. Something unremarkable may suddenly become the most remarkable thing in our lives. As with David, it is what we do with it that makes a difference. We can put it in a bubble and say it won't ever happen again. Or we can recognize the history that led us to sin.

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