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## "ARE THEY NOT ALL MINISTERING SPIRITS?"

– AUG. 28. – 2 KINGS 6:8-18. –

"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." – Psa. 34:7.

THE SPECIAL feature of this Scripture lesson is that there are invisible powers on every hand for the protection and assistance of the Lord's people, while doing his work. As we have already shown, there are "wicked spirits," invisible to humanity, whose fiendish delight is to deceive, mislead and ensnare mankind.\* But in this lesson we have the other side of the question presented to our attention. It is an encouragement to know that, tho beset by evil spirits, the Lord's people are surrounded by other invisible agents no less powerful, whose interest in their welfare is of the highest order, and who are near to guard us in proportion as our hearts are pure, and loyal to the Lord and his Word.

\*See What Say the Scriptures About Spiritualism? – 10c. per copy.

Tho we do not understand the process, we accept the fact, that God has both spoken and written and operated miraculously through holy men of old. We have had illustrations of this in the preceding lessons respecting Elijah and Elisha. But how these communications [R2349 : page 239] were made to the prophets we are not informed. Quite possibly they were made through the invisible spirit beings who serve the Lord and his people. Concerning these invisible spirit beings, angels, the Apostle says, "Are they not all ministering [serving] spirits, sent forth to minister unto those who shall be heirs of salvation?" It may be that they ministered to Elijah and Elisha the information which they possessed, and which therefore constituted them prophets. For instance, in this lesson, we are informed that Elisha sent word in advance to the king of Israel respecting the movements and intentions

of the king of Syria, and that his fame as a seer had extended to Syria: so that the counsellors of Syria's king explained the matter to him, saying, "Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest secretly in thy bedchamber."

Is it unreasonable to suppose that it was these invisible ministering spirits which were the divine instrumentality in making known to Elisha the things proper to be told to the king of Israel for his protection? We think it not unlikely; we think it probable. In one of our previous lessons we saw that, when the Shunammite woman came to Elisha to inquire about her son, Elisha said, "The Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me." (2 Kings 4:27.) From this it is evident that it was not by any power that the prophet himself possessed that he had any special knowledge, but by revelations from the Lord. And this agrees with the testimony of the Apostle Peter, who says, "Holy men of old spake as they were moved by the holy spirit." (2 Pet. 1:21.) Our suggestion is that the holy spirit of God communicated information to the prophets through the holy angels, the invisible spirit beings who encamp round about them that fear God. But for God to use this instrumentality in communication would make it no less his power, just as he may use the lightning or the storm to do his work, and it be none the less his work; just as we may speak by telephone or telegraph or cable, and it be as really our word and deed as tho done without those agencies of communication.

The folly of humanity attempting to cope with the spiritual powers is well illustrated in this lesson by the conduct of the king of Syria in sending an armed company to capture Elisha. He might well have reasoned that if the prophet had information of his most secret plans respecting the king of Israel, he would none the less have information respecting the proposed capture of himself. But the king of Syria and some of his people were to be taught a lesson respecting the power of the God of Israel, and of any man whom the God of Israel might choose to use as his channel or mouthpiece. Here, the foolishness of man was made to show forth the wisdom and power of God.

Elisha's servant (not Gehazi, we may feel assured, but another more worthy), seeing the armed host surrounding the city, was in terror, but the Prophet, who likewise saw the armed host, also discerned another host, more powerful, more numerous; and he entreated the Lord on behalf of his servant that he might have an [R2350 : page 239] opening of the eyes, to see that all the mountains round about them were filled with spirit beings – "horses and chariots of fire," or like fire, as all spirit beings are described in Scripture. (See Ezek. 1:13,14; Dan. 7:9; Rev. 4:3-5.) The Lord answered the prayer: and then the young man saw what Elisha had already told him, that "they that be with us are more than they that be with them."

It is important that every Christian should have the eyes of his understanding opened, that he may see by faith that which was shown to Elisha and his servant literally. During this Gospel age the Lord does not open our natural eyes to see the wonderful provisions he has made for us, and his power for our protection; but instead he gives us a still better knowledge of the subject through his Word of grace and truth, so that we are enabled to walk by faith and not by sight; to see the armies of the Lord encamped around about us and to recognize their protection of us, without any miracle being performed upon our natural sight. None of us are sufficiently strong to pass through the fight of Christian warfare without just such assistances as these which the Lord has provided, and which faith beholds, accepts, lays hold of, rests upon and is strengthened by.

Shall we call this faith in invisible spiritual powers and agencies of God the *true spiritualism* of the Scriptures – in contradistinction to the *evil spiritualism* which is of Satan and his fellows, the fallen angels, the "wicked spirits in exalted positions?" We believe that this is so, and spiritualists admit that there are both good and evil spirits. They are sure that there are evil spirits, because they know how these have ensnared them in evil, enticed them into sin. They know that they are what the Scriptures term "lying spirits," because they have been lied to by the spirits which communicated with them; but they insist that there

are good spirits, and they think that sometimes they have had communications with these. But this proposition we dispute: we hold that all the rapping, wonder doing and other manifestations of so-called spiritists are from the Evil One, and his consorts entirely.

A very small amount of common sense should convince anyone that the holy angels must have something better, higher, nobler, to do than are the various [R2350 : page 240] practices of these so-called spirits who speak through mediums and by obsession. Indeed, we hold that the good spirits, the holy angels, make no communications with man now: that these communications belonged to a previous time, when they were appropriate and necessary as the channels of divine communication. We do not need their ministry through mediums to-day, and are especially forbidden to seek communication or knowledge through such channels: this for the same reason that we do not need the testimony of the inspired seers and prophets to-day; because God has made an abundant provision for us through the prophetic utterances of the past, to the intent that we of this Gospel age should walk not by sight nor by communication with the angels, but by faith. We may realize no less clearly, but even more clearly, than did the ancients that he who is on our part is more than all they that be against us; we may discern by the eye of faith that the "angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them;" we may realize that all the powers of heaven – "more than twelve legions of angels" – altho invisible to us, are nevertheless present, and fully subservient to every will of our glorious Lord; and that thus surrounded and protected we are living "under the shadow of the Almighty" and, as it were, in the hollow of his hand.

In this connection we are reminded of our Lord's words respecting his faithful disciples, his "little ones." He assures us that the very humblest of those who are his have high connections with the heavenly throne, saying, "Their angels do always behold the face of my Father in heaven." (Matt. 18:10.) That is to say, as the angels are all "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs

of salvation" (the Gospel Church), there are some of them who have a charge, a watch, a care over each member of the body of Christ. Perhaps one guardian angel to each saint, perhaps more than one; but we have the Lord's assurance that his provision is "sufficient." One thought that our Lord's words give to us is, that these holy angels, charged with ministering to and caring for the elect, are in no danger of being detained so that they must wait for a long time on more important business before having access to the Father: on the contrary, they always have access to him, they can always see his face; and through the Redeemer, and by these agencies, God is ever ready to respond to our cries and to cause all things to work together for good to them that love him.

Turning to the host of Syria, the prophet prayed to the Lord that they might be smitten with blindness, our Common Version says; but from the original text the thought would appear to be not the loss of sight, but a bewilderment or hallucination, somewhat similar to that produced by hypnotism; when a person sees or imagines that he sees things differently from what they actually are. Exercising this power upon the host, Elisha guided them to the city of Samaria, saying, "This is not the way, neither is this the city; follow me, I will bring you to the man whom ye seek." And this was true, for Dothan was not Elisha's city, his home was in Samaria, and thither he took them; and he did indeed bring them to the man they sought, namely, himself; but not after the manner that they had expected. The narrative proceeds to say that when he had led them into the city of Samaria (under the influence of some power like hypnotism), he then said, "Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see," and then they understood where they were. They were completely in the hands of their enemies; surrounded by the king of Israel and his soldiers.

The king of Israel inquired whether or not he should smite them with the sword? Such an inquiry seems to indicate a considerable change of the kingly attitude toward the Lord and his representative: the reformation work was taking effect; Israel's kings were learning

gradually that the will of the Lord was to be considered, and that to neglect his counsel would be unwise indeed. Elisha, in his reply, shows a large and benevolent heart, in full accord with the highest teachings of the New Testament. He showed the king that these men should not be put to death; but that instead a better way would be to return good for the intended evil. Accordingly, the king made a great feast and entertained his enemies and sent them home. We cannot doubt that they marveled at their peculiar experiences, and the happy outcome of what seemed for the moment so great a disaster. We may suppose, too, that they had a higher degree of respect for the Lord and his prophets and the king upon the throne of Israel, than they ever before had.

There is a lesson in this for us also: the best victories are the bloodless ones; the ones in which the spirit of righteousness and mercy and benevolence gains the victory over the spirit of rivalry, ambition and selfishness. This, under the New Covenant, among the soldiers of the cross is known as fighting the good fight and overcoming evil with good. It may not succeed in fullest measure in the present time, but nevertheless it will develop in ourselves the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and prepare us for a share in the strong government of the future, which with one hand will restrain the wicked and all the powers of evil, while with the other hand it blesses, washes, refreshes and anoints with the oil of gladness and blessing all the willing and obedient of the entire groaning creation.

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