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Testing: God's School for Angels

525-B

Series: Testing

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Testing: God's School for Angels

Why does God test His children? There are at least nine reasons that we have studied so far.

1- To develop in us the mind of Christ. He wants our responses to be His because His ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

2- To surface our weaknesses. We are not objective about our shortcomings. Most of us either think that all we have are weaknesses, or that we don't have any weaknesses. God surfaces these needs through testing.

3- To humble us. The Scriptural way to be exalted is to be humbled. Most of us do not humble ourselves and therefore God, through testing, humbles us.

4- To advance the kingdom. God places us strategically where we need to be. Through testing, He moves us about geographically and spiritually into positions and places where the lost are and where those who need to grow are.

5- To draw us to the Word. He wants to give us a hunger for the Word.

6- To enlarge our vision of Himself. He wants to teach us that God is, not that God does, not that God has or that God has been, but that God is.

7- To equip us to minister to others. He wants us to minister to others with the same comfort that we ourselves have been comforted of God.

8- To develop our prayers lives. He wants us to learn to be honest with Him. He wants us to learn to ask for mercy and grace. He wants us to learn how to cry out for help. He wants us to learn how to meditate upon the works, the Word, the worth and the ways of God.

9- To prove His faithfulness. For the last four lessons we have

been dealing with the principle that God tests His children to prove to Satan His faithfulness. Satan will try to steal the seed, kill the roots, and destroy the fruits. The tests in the Christian's life are allowed by God. We have been looking at how the seed of the Word is kept intact by right response to testing. Instead of being destroyed, we grow thereby.

10- To minister to the angels. The tenth reason that God tests His children has to do with the unusual relationship between the believer and the spirit beings that inhabit the spirit world. We have been dealing with the negative aspect of the spirit world by looking at Satan and his demonic host and how they affect and are affected by testing in the life of the Christian. That is just part of the story.

In this lesson we want to look at the echelon of spirit beings who are still serving Him. It is their role to minister to Him, to minister to the believer, to be taught and affected by and ministered to by the Christian. You have a ministry to angels. They play an important part in the testing of Christians. Our response to that testing plays a major part in the instruction and growth of the angels. In the next two lessons, we will explore six areas in the lives of angels.

1- The nature and character of angels. Who are they? Where did they come from? How many are there? What are they doing?

2- The ministry of angels to God. What are they doing in heaven?

3- The ministry of angels to the Christians. What are they doing on earth?

4- The ministry of the Christian to angels. There are five things angels learn from you.

5- The principles we can learn from angels. Angels are parallel parables of the Christian experience. We will see these principles in this lesson. What can we learn in terms of principle from the angels.

6- How you can have a ministry to angels.

THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF ANGELS

Let's begin by exploring the heavens and the angelic host

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that reside there. First of all, we need to look at the nature and origin of angels. Who are they? Where did they come from?

Angels have not always existed, regardless of a common misunderstanding to the contrary. They were created beings created by God. Let's turn to Nehemiah 9:6. Sometimes I think we talk more about Satan's demonic hosts than we do about God's angelic host.

Thou alone art the Lord. Thou hast made the heavens, the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. Thou dost give life to all of them and the heavenly host bows down before Thee. (Nehemiah 9:6 NASB)

In Colossians 1:16 and 17 we read,

For in (by) Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through (by) Him and for Him.

And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:16,17 NASB)

The angels were created by Jesus Christ. They are created beings and did not exist before the beginning of time. They were, however, present at the creation of the world.

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth! Tell Me, if you have understanding,

Who set its measurements, since you know? Or who stretched the line on it?

“On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4-7 NASB)

It was an exciting time for the angels when the earth was created. They were there at that time. They have not always existed. They were created at the hand of Jesus before the creation of the world.

Secondly, what are they like? What is their nature? They are not glorified human beings. We read this in Matthew 22:3. Like the angels in heaven, our spirit bodies, when we get to heaven, will have certain characteristics. Although they will resemble

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humans in heaven, they are not glorified humans. They are spirit beings with spirit bodies. We read this in Hebrews 1:14 and in Psalm 104:4.

Angels often reveal themselves in bodily form. There are 104 times in Scripture where angels appeared to man. They are greater in knowledge than humans are. They are smarter than humans. However, they are not omniscient. We can turn to II Samuel 14:20 to see this:

“in order to change the appearance of things your servant Joab has done this thing. But my lord is wise, like the wisdom of the angel of God, to know all that is in the earth.”
(II Samuel 14:20 NASB)

So we see that they are very wise. We now go to Matthew 24:36. Here we see that among other things, they do not know the day or the hour that the Son of Man is coming back. They are not omniscient. However, they are smarter than we are. There are, however, some things that we know that they don't. We will cover this in the next lesson.

Angels are stronger than we are, but they are not omnipotent. We can turn to II Peter 2:11 to see this:

whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord.
(II Peter 2:11 NASB)

The crux of this passage is that angels are greater in power than we are. We can read in Acts 5:19 another point in this area. We have seen many Wonder Woman and Superman images in entertainment venues. We sometimes visualize that if we could just pop into a telephone booth and change our clothes, there is very little that we could not do.

But an angel of the Lord during the night opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out...
(Acts 5:19 NASB)

In Matthew 28:2 we read,

And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it.(Matthew 28:2 NASB)

The stone in this passage would have been a wheel of granite

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approximately 8 feet in diameter and 1 foot thick. It would weigh approximately more than four tons. Some people who are in good physical shape think they may be able to handle something like that, but most of us recognize that angels are stronger than we are. However, they are not omnipotent.

Here are some other facts about angels that are interesting. The first is that they need no rest or at least they can get by without rest. We are not angels as we see in Revelations 4:8. They travel at inconceivable speeds. We see this in Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 8. They can speak languages.

I Corinthians 13:1 says,

Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not (charity) love, I become as a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. (I Corinthians 13:1)

Obviously, there is some language that they can speak. They can also cook as we learn in I Kings 19:5-7.

He lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, "Arise, eat."

Then he looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again.

The angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you." (I Kings 19:5-7 NASB)

How are angels divided and organized? Before we go into this aspect, let's remind ourselves of the principles of parallel applications. Angels are messengers and God's ambassadors and servants in the spirit world. They are doing the will of God in the spirit realm. You and I, people redeemed, are God's messengers to a lost and dying world. As such, we are His portrait of Himself in doing the will of God on earth. Therefore, a study of angels will teach us not only their behavior and interest, but also a glimpse of principles that apply to you and me as we are representatives of God on this earth. We can learn a lot of basic principles from the angels.

First of all, we need to know how many of them exist. Daniel 7:10 tells us that there are thousands upon thousands, myriads

upon myriads of angels. We read in Revelation 5:11,

And I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and a number of them were myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands. (Revelation 5:11 NASB)

In our Texan vernacular we could say there are bunches and bunches of angels. We read in Matthew 26:53 that Jesus, had He so chosen, could have called 12 legions of angels. This amount would be 72,000. We know there are bunches and bunches and bunches of angels.

How are they classified? There are four classifications listed in Scripture.

1- The first classification is the general word for angels. The word is angels or "*aggelos*". It means messenger. It is the same word that is used in Luke 7:24 to describe the disciples who are God's messengers. Most passages in Scripture relate to the general body of angels themselves.

2- The cherubim are the first of the three other classifications of angels in Scripture. They are listed in Genesis 3:24 and Ezekiel 28:14-16. The cherubim have three jobs that we know of. They guard the gate to paradise. They guard the way to the mercy seat. They support the throne of God. Satan, apparently, was a cherubim before he fell.

3- The next is the seraphim. These angels are concerned with cleansing and holiness. They lead heaven in the worship of God. They purify God's servants for worship and service. In Isaiah 6:1-4 God is seated above the cherubim with the seraphim standing below.

The interesting point is that there are various roles of angels just as there are various gifts in the body of Christ.

4- Then there are the archangels. So there are not only various roles, but also various echelons of authority. The archangels are listed in a number of places in Scripture. These are the leaders and spokesmen for the angelic hosts. They protected and prospered Israel in Daniel 10 and 12. They announced the birth of Christ in Luke 1. They will defeat Satan in his attempt to kill the man-child in Revelation 12. They will herald the return of Christ in I Thessalonians 4. There is only

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one of them called by a definite name, Michael. They do have their own hierarchy as we read in Revelation 12:7. They have lieutenants, sergeants and other officers. While the apocryphal book of Enoch lists seven of them, the Scripture only gives us the name of one.

Look at the orderliness of God as you view the echelons of the angelic hosts. Even Satan, in his attempt to imitate this, has his own principalities and powers. He has an organized group of troops himself.

God has named many of the angels. He has probably named them all, but we only know the names of four. The first is Michael, which means the prince of Israel. We found him recorded in Daniel 10, 11 and Jude 9. Michael contended with Satan over the body of Moses.

Gabriel is the second one. He is the one who stands before God. He is found in Daniel chapters 8 and 9 and Luke 1.

The next is Lucifer. This is Satan, the deceiver, who was once an angel of God. We find this in Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, Matthew 4 and Luke 10.

The fourth angel that is given a name in Scripture is Abaddon or Apollyon. This is the king over the bottomless pit. He is named in Revelation 9.

The structure of authority is thrones, dominions, principalities and powers or authorities. There is a different word for each and they stand for various roles and relationships to the King.

What about their appearance and characteristics? Angels move about in spirit bodies. They are not limited by space or objects. We find this in Hebrews 1:14. Their appearance can strike awe in the hearts of men. We can learn from them the power that is evident when sin is not present in a life. We can learn the power that is evident when you have been in the presence of God. In Matthew 28, we find one of about five illustrations in Scripture when an angel appears in the presence of men.

And his appearance was like lightning, and his garment as white as snow;

and the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.

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And the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified."
(Matthew 28:3-5 NASB)

The guards had the right to become like dead men. The angels radiated the glory of God. They are always dressed in white. We see this in John 20 and Daniel 7. We know that at least some of them have wings as we see in Daniel 9:21 and Revelation 14:6. John Calvin wrote, "They have wings not without cause but rather to assure us that when the occasion requires, they will hasten to our aide with incredible swiftness, winging their way to us at the speed of lightning."

The angelic hosts often have wings. They always appear in white. Their presence can strike awe in the hearts of men. Their voice can be loud and commanding as we see in John 12:29. They tell us of the power of the Word of God. We know that angels eat as we can see in Psalm 78:25. They do not marry. They do not die as seen in Mark 12. These are some things, in general, that we know about angels.

The angel's job has changed through the years. At the beginning of time, in the early years of Israel being brought into a nation, God the Father used the angelic hosts as His messengers to them. Israel was receiving the Word of God and doing the will of God, at least on occasions. The angels of God were His messengers. Occasionally, His Son, Jesus, would appear as THE angel of the Lord Himself. He would deal with specific instances with the nation of Israel or with individuals within the nation. God used the angels to deal with the nation Israel.

If you do a careful study of Hebrews 1 and 2, you will find that this was a role that changed when Jesus came to earth. The Scripture tells us that He made Himself a little lower than the angels. He came down below the level of the angels and humbled Himself to become a servant to men. As He did that, as it came time for the redemption of the body of Christ, He was crucified, He was dead and He was buried. The Holy Spirit then came to inhabit the believer. Now Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father, and each believer has the Holy Spirit. The church has been opened to Jew and Gentile alike. Now the angels are still God's messengers, but they are now ministering

spirits to the body of Christ.

There will come a time during the great tribulation when the Holy Spirit will once again be gone from the world. The One who restrains will be gone as believers are taken out of the world. As He inhabits the saints, He will be gone. At that point in time, we see in the book of Revelation that God will use angels to speak to the nation of Israel who will be once again front and center on the stage of eternity. However, at the end of that time, when the Lord Himself will return with all of His saints and all of His angels, we then in turn will be raised up to our rightful position above the angels. We will rule over them, judging or being responsible for the behavior and activities of the angels. Now we are a little lower than the angels. Then, we will be above the angels. We will rule over them as Christ rules over us. This is the changing perspective in the role of angels in the life of the church.

What have the angels done through the years? To the nation Israel, they had a lot of odd jobs just as we do. They were charged with finding a wife in Genesis 24. They were charged with winning a war in Genesis 33. They were charged with destroying enemies in II Samuel 24. They were charged with apprehending a backslidden prophet by providing fire insurance. They were responsible for giving a lion lockjaw. They were responsible for winning a wrestling match. They had the responsibility for protecting believers from harm.

What did they do for Christ Himself? They informed Mary that He would be born. They assured Joseph of the truth of Mary's story. They proclaimed His birth to the shepherds. They ministered to Him in the wilderness. They ascended and descended upon Him as the Father was pleased with Him at His baptism. They strengthened Him in the garden. They were willing to respond with twelve legions if necessary as He was apprehended. They rolled away the stone. They accompanied Him at His ascension to be with the Father. They will accompany Him as He raptures the church. They will come back with us as Christ brings the church back to rule and to reign forever. These are the roles of the angels in time past, both to the nation Israel and to Christ Himself.

THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS TO GOD.

We will now come to the application part of this lesson. We had to have a foundation on which to build because some of us are not as familiar with who the angels are and what they do. We like to get excited about the angels. I realize that God loves us so much that He has an angelic host at our beckon call, not only waiting to minister to our every need, but learning from us who He is.

What is the ministry of angels to God? There are four things that I want us to learn about our role in relationship to Christ, from the angels. I believe that the angels in many ways parallel believers.

1- Angels are messengers to share the Word. A messenger is one who delivers the Word of another. You and I were called by God to be messengers of God. The angels are our example. They always deliver the message perfectly. They never refuse to deliver it. They are always on time. They are always available to hear the response of the hearer. They are our example of a messenger.

2- Angels are an example of worshippers. Worshippers are ones who fall down before and pay proper respect to another who is worthy of worship. The angels are the perfect example of worshippers as we read about them in the manner in which they worship the Father in heaven. We can learn how we in turn should worship the Father through the Son.

3- Angels are a perfect example of ministers. A minister is one who serves and meets the needs of another. They always come down to serve. They serve the Father continuously, the one who is above them. We, who are a little lower than the angels, are constantly being served and ministered to by the angels.

4- Angels are learners. A learner is one who is always open to and seeking to be taught by another. Angels are always learning. They never quit. They are learning from believers, and they are learning from God. They are learning from the One who is over them, and they are learning from the ones who are under them. We have a hard time with that, don't we? We may be able to learn from others who are over us, but we can almost never learn from those who are under us. The angels

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are learning both ways. They have the perfect example of a teachable spirit.

Angels are messengers, ministers, worshippers and learners. We are supposed to follow their example.

There are 104 times that angels appear to men. They appeared in Luke 1 to Zacharias. They appeared in Luke 1 to Mary. They appeared in Matthew 1 to Joseph. They appeared in Luke 2 to the shepherds. They appeared in Acts 10 to Cornelius. They appeared in Acts 27 to Paul. These are just a few times their appearances are described in Scripture. They are messengers of God. They serve God by delivering His messages.

They serve Him through worship as we see in Hebrews 1:6 and Matthew 18:10. They serve Him by punishing God's enemies. We see this in Acts 19:20-23. They serve Him by occasionally delivering punishment to His own as seen in II Samuel 24:15.

There are 11 ways that I have found that angels minister to the believer. Before you can appreciate the fact that you are ministering to angels, you have to accept the fact that God, in His love, has them continually ministering to you. You may not be aware of it. They may be ministering to you this very hour. Chances are, before the week is out, you will be ministered to by angels without even knowing it. I am not trying to create a spooky atmosphere. I just want to tell you what is in the Word. There are at least 11 ways that angels minister to you.

1- They lead unbelievers to witnessing Christians and vice-versa. In Acts 10 we see Cornelius being led to Peter. The angel of the Lord appeared in both men's lives and brought the two together. In Acts 8:26, we read about the Ethiopian eunuch and Phillip. An angel of the Lord simply put them together. I believe that God sends spirit messengers from heaven to arrange meetings to protect and guide and influence those who will respond to His message. Some of you can testify to the fact that you seemed to have been watched over by guardian angels prior to your conversion. It seems that God had certain things brought to bear in your life or certain people who crossed your path or certain preparations in your life to bring you to a place where your heart would say, "Yes!" to Jesus Christ.

There is an advertisement that says, "You are in good hands

with Allstate.” No pun intended, but I believe that you are in good hands with the angelic hosts prior to your becoming a Christian. I believe that God is at work through His angelic hosts to prepare you and guard you and bring you to the proper place for you to respond. They, also, will bring someone to you with the message of salvation, or they may send you to someone with the message of salvation.

I've heard someone say, “Wasn't it a coincidence that I was at a certain place and this person told me about Jesus Christ?” I have also heard, “Wasn't it a coincidence that my car broke down and a man who came to help asked if I had ever heard the four spiritual laws and I believed?” Some of you have said, “The strangest thing happened, there was a certain set of circumstances that I was put in touch with someone who I didn't care much about. He had some things to share with me. Fate threw us together and before it was all over I knew Jesus Christ.” Someone else has said, “Unreal things have happened in my life. I have had trauma, sickness and difficulty. I was at death's door when all of a sudden, God brought a person into my life. He shared with me the claims of Jesus Christ and I came to a saving faith in Him.”

No matter what your story is, you can look back at your life prior to Christ and see many circumstances that were arranged, I believe by God, with the help of His angelic hosts, to put you in a position and place to be in touch with that special person that God wanted to use to bring the claims of Christ into your life. So one way that God uses angels is to lead unbelievers to witnessing Christians.

2- We find another way they are used in Luke 12:8 and 9. First we are told that God numbers the hairs on our head. Jesus then says,

“And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man shall confess him also before the angels of God;

but he who denies Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. (Luke 12:8,9 NASB)

The angels know your name. I believe that when each of us accepted Christ as our personal Savior and confessed Him as Lord, the Lord Jesus went into the presence of the holy angels

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and declared before them that we had said, "Yes," to the grace of God. The holy angels heard pronounced that we had become Christians.

3- We find another thing that angels do in Luke 15. This is the story of the woman who found the lost coin.

"And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!'

"In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

(Luke 15:9,10 NASB)

I believe that the angels had a party in heaven when each of us became a Christian. It wasn't because of what we were like before we accepted Christ. I believe that every time someone comes to know Christ, the angels in heaven gather together around the throne of God and rejoice. The day you received Christ into your heart, there was a time of joy and rejoicing in heaven as the angels sang forth just as they did in Luke 2:13 and 14 when they sang with joy at the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that every time Christ is born in the heart of someone the angels sing. The first time He was born in Bethlehem and through the ages since until the church age is over, He will be born in the hearts of men who say "Yes" and respond to Him. Every time He is born anew, I believe that a name is pronounced in heaven and the angelic chorus tunes up and begins to sing, "Hosanna, joy to the name of the Lord." This happens even over you and me. This is an exciting thought.

There is going to be a lot of singing in heaven. Some of us may feel out of place. I think that is why we need to sing more down here so that we can practice. The angels have been singing for generations. They sing every time a believer is ushered into the fellowship of the King.

4- The angels minister to our physical needs and physical safety. The first verse to look at is in Psalm 34:7,

The angel of the Lord encampeth round about those who fear him, and he delivereth them. (Psalm 34:7)

We have evidence in the Scripture as to how the angels have delivered believers in time passed. On occasion, the guardian

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angel has been called to protect. *I believe that each of us has our own guardian angel watching over us to minister to the needs of our life.* In the next lesson, I will give more verses for this section.

We will also deal with how angels test our generosity and hospitality as they appear unawares. We will look at how angels carry us home when we die. We will look how angels will be used at the judgment to separate the believers from the unbelievers. Then we will deal with five things found in four passages that you and I have to teach to angels. The angels are watching us to learn from us. There are five things that the angels are learning about the Father, the Son, the plan of God and the wisdom of God by watching us. You and I need to be careful as this happens. We will ask ourselves how we can teach an angel.

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