

Guardian Angels: One Per Capita (Usually)

Jerry A. Stevens

July 24, 2010

A close reading of the Bible and inspired statements of Ellen G. White informs us that neither body of inspired literature supports the assumption that God's children have two guardian angels, or even more. If such assumption is based on the following passage, the plain reading of the text is that in the repetition of the phrase "the angel who" Sister White merely reinforces the interposition of a single angel (notice the final "him" and that there is no "them" to reference multiple angels):

Every redeemed one will understand the ministry of angels in his own life. The angel who was his guardian from his earliest moment; the angel who watched his steps, and covered his head in the day of peril; the angel who was with him in the valley of the shadow of death, who marked his resting place, who was the first to greet him in the resurrection morning—what will it be to hold converse with him, and to learn the history of divine interposition in the individual life, of heavenly cooperation in every work for humanity!—Ed 305.2, in Mar 314.4 and TA 301.3–302.0.

In another place, Ellen writes: "Angels of God are commissioned from Heaven to guard the children of men, and yet they draw away from their restraining influences and go where they can have communication with the evil angels" (MS 82, Jan. 25, 1902, in 5MR 125.2 and TA 15.1).

The expression "children of men" as here used indicates every human being, not just those who profess Christ, as the following statement makes even clearer:

Where there is a heart in which the light of Heaven does not radiate, there is a solitude in which Christ cannot abide. By the side of every soul is an angel-presence. I have been instructed that with Christ there was given to our world all the treasures of Heaven. Nothing was reserved. If man does not open the door of his heart to Christ Jesus and commune with Him, Satanic agencies will commune with him [that unwise man].—1888 1789.2.

At this point it would be well to add a note of explanation. Sister White uses interchangeable expressions throughout her voluminous writings. We should understand, therefore, that references such as "every redeemed one," "children of men," "every soul," "each one" ("in every family"), "every follower of Christ," "subjects of grace," etc., all mean essentially the same thing: the Biblical "heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14). We must be careful when we add also that children who have not reached the age of accountability "are not subjects of grace" because "they have not experienced the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus, and the evil angels have access to these children" (RH Sept. 19, 1854, para. 11; RH Oct. 14, 1895, para. 8; RH March 28, 1893, para. 11, in PH140 20.1). In this special sense, "subjects of grace" does not equate precisely with "children of men" or "every soul," for instance. The English language is full of such nuances; therefore overgeneralization can be dangerously misleading.

Returning to our main discussion, it is possible that some see a reference to plural

guardian angels per capita in their reading of the following account of Ellen's "shaking time" vision in late 1857:

"I was shown those whom I had before seen weeping, and praying with agony of spirit [victorious saints, survivors of the shaking time]. I saw the company of guardian angels around them had doubled" (1T 181.3; cf. RH Dec. 31, 1857, para. 7). But these words do not necessarily imply that all of God's children have two instead of one guardian angel throughout life, though in times of extreme emergency God may choose to call in reinforcements (praise His holy name!).

An illustration of the preceding paragraph is that Ellen G. White herself, acting in no less a capacity than that of the Lord's messenger, gained a second guardian angel at certain extraordinarily stressful times. In the first months of 1845 while living in Maine, young Ellen Harmon (for she was not yet married), was given remarkable divine assurance, specifically:

If I felt an influence affecting my testimony, no matter where I might be, I had only to cry to God, and another angel would be sent to my rescue. I already had one guardian angel attending me continually, but when necessary, the Lord would send another to strengthen, and raise me above the power of every earthly influence.—2SG 52.0.

Almost immediately, Ellen had occasion to put God to the test on this very promise. An enemy of the truth, Joseph Turner, attempted to use hypnotic influence to bring her under his baleful influence. She relates what happened during this chilling encounter:

He had his hand up to his face, and was looking through his fingers, his eyes intently fixed upon me. His lips were compressed, and a low groan now and then escaped him. In a moment I remembered the promise which the LORD had given me, and turned to him and related what the LORD had shown me in Portland; that if I was in danger of being affected by a human influence, to ask for another angel, who would be sent to protect me. I then raised my hands to Heaven and earnestly cried, "Another angel, FATHER! another angel!" I knew that my request was granted. I felt shielded by the strong SPIRIT of the LORD, and was borne above every earthly influence, and with freedom finished my testimony. The saints were comforted, and rejoiced in the LORD.—2SG 63.0.

We could go on. There is one ostensibly plausible reference to "Jesus and your guardian angels" in 1T 168.3, until we notice that it is drawn from a testimony addressed to two brethren simultaneously. And another: "Angels are commissioned to watch in every family. Each one has the watchcare of a holy angel" (Lt 82, May 31, 1900, in TDG 160.2). This must mean one per capita, not one per family; as the expression "a holy angel" is singular, not plural. Moreover, the key text of this devotional reading is Ps. 91:9–11, which promises that "He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." "Thee" as used here evidently is in the second person plural. This understanding accords with the following inspired statement:

A guardian angel is appointed to every follower of Christ. These heavenly watchers shield the righteous from the power of the wicked one. This Satan himself recognized when he said: "Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not Thou

made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?" Job 1:9, 10. The agency by which God protects His people is presented in the words of the psalmist: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." Psalm 34:7. Said the Saviour, speaking of those that believe in Him: "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." Matthew 18:10. The angels appointed to minister to the children of God have at all times access to His presence.—GC 512.2–513.0, in TA 14.1.

The foregoing account of angelic one-on-one is totally unambiguous. After all, we have God's promise: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them" (Ps. 34:7). Consider this, as well: "A silent witness [in the context of a discussion of angelic function] guards every soul that lives, seeking to win and draw him to Christ" (ST June 6, 1895, para. 5); cf. "... seeking to draw that soul to Christ" (6T 366.1).

Yet another revealing statement reads: "The Lord loves you [*corporately* addressed to "brethren and sisters in Pitcairn Island"], and His guardian angels are round about you" (MS 1, Jan. 5, 1894, in 14MR 71.3 and UL 19.4). Another comment obviously pairs plural angels with plural earthly children: "Parents can do much. By earnest prayer and living faith they may bind their children upon the altar, and thus secure the watchcare of guardian angels . . ." (ST Feb. 26, 1880, para. 9).

By comparison, only our Lord Himself, from all that we have read, is said to have had multiple guardian angels *throughout* His life on Earth, * as Ellen makes clear in 6Red 18.1; 3SP 199.2–200.0; and DA 793.1, in TA 214.5. She explains this in further detail:

Two angels in the form of men. . . . were of the company that had been waiting in a shining cloud to escort Jesus to His heavenly home. The most exalted of the angel throng, they were the two who had come to the tomb at Christ's resurrection, and they had been with Him throughout His life on Earth. With eager desire all Heaven had waited for the end of His tarrying in a world marred by the curse of sin. The time had now come for the heavenly universe to receive their King. Did not the two angels long to join the throng that welcomed Jesus? But in sympathy and love for those whom He had left, they waited to give them comfort. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Heb. 1:14.—DA 831.1–832.1, in TA 221.1, 2.

A fascinating sidelight to the above passage is that one of the two angels is none other than Gabriel, whom God appointed to occupy the position once held by Lucifer. This can be shown by closely comparing comments in several references: DA 693.3; ST Dec. 9, 1897, para. 2, in 5BC 1123.8; DA 779.2–780.0; and YI July 28, 1898.7.

* The careful Bible student will recall that after Peter cut off Malchus's ear in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus remonstrated with him: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Mt. 26:53). Since a Roman army legion consisted of 3,000–5,000 men (see GC 514.2), the total number of guardian angels would have amounted to between 36,000–60,000. Now that is extraterrestrially extraordinary protection!

But with respect to the entire mortal human race, even were angel guardianship limited strictly to those of the age of accountability who profess Christ, we are induced to declare that the notion of two guardian angels per capita, throughout the human lifetime, is apocryphal—whether such life span is thought to have its onset at the beginning of natural birth or is considered to begin with spiritual rebirth in Christ. In extraordinary circumstances God furnishes additional angelic help, but we have demonstrated that this is not the usual case.