

Further Background Reading for Teen Discussion

WHEN ANGELS HELD YOU BACK

By Rev. Donald L. Rose

Probably all of us have done things we regret. Even more certainly, we have said things for which we feel remorse. But consider the times when you *almost* did or said something, but somehow, to your later relief, you were held back and did not carry it through.

We can see this portrayed many times in the Word. For example, in Genesis 20:6, the king of Gerar was amazed when God told him in a dream, "I withheld you from sinning against me." An unforgettable example is when David was prevented from taking revenge by a beautiful woman. I believe that the wise intervention of this woman is an example of what angels do in our own lives. In I Samuel, chapter 25, David had been insulted, and he was determined to get deadly revenge. He was on his way with sword in hand, intending to repay the insult with violence. But then Abigail, "a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance" (verse 3), came to meet David. Both her beauty and her understanding affected the furious David. He listened to her as she told him that in the future he would grieve over the memory of having shed blood in anger. Charmed and grateful, here is what he said to that lovely emissary: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! And blessed is your advice and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed..." (verses 32-33). He praised God who, as he said "kept me back from hurting" (verse 34).

Notice that David said to Abigail that God "sent you" to meet me. "Send" is the term from which we get the word *angel*, which means "one who is sent". Now compare this to a striking teaching from the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church, given through Emanuel Swedenborg. In a chapter about the uses or work of angels, we read,

In general, angels from each society are sent to people to watch over them and to lead them away from evil affections and consequent thoughts, and to inspire them with good affections so far as they will receive them in freedom; and by means of these they also control the deeds or works by removing as far as possible evil intentions (Heaven and Hell 391).

Notice the phrase "so far as they will receive them in freedom." In the story David said to Abigail "See, I have heeded your voice and respected your person" (verse 35). That was a free choice. He could have resisted the heavenly influence and insisted on his own anger. We, also, are quite free. In fact, it is a vital part of religious life that we actually ask God to "deliver us from evil." Try thinking of this story when you say that phrase in the Lord's Prayer. And try thanking God for the instances in your life when you did not do or say something wrong that you had at first intended.

You may find yourself becoming more attuned to angelic influences and grateful, like David who exclaimed, "Blessed be the Lord...who sent you this day to meet me! And blessed is your advice; and blessed are you..." (verses 32-33).