

## ANGELS AND THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Lessons: Judges 2

The word “angel” is found more in the book of Judges than in almost any other book of the Word. (The exception is the book of Revelation.) And what picture should we have in our minds when we see the word “angel?” That is largely what this talk is about.

The book of Judges tells of a number of different heroes (leaders, or judges) who were raised up by the Lord to lead the people when they had gotten themselves into trouble and difficulty by turning away from Him.

When great trouble came to them they would cry out to the Lord. Indeed, they cried in more ways than one. It is said in the second chapter of Judges that an angel came to tell them that because they did not obey the Lord, the people of the land would be a trouble to them and would be as thorns in their sides. When they heard the angel say that, they wept, and named the place Bochim, or a “place of weeping” (*Judges 2:4, 5*).

The two best known of the leaders called Judges were Gideon and Samson, and it is in their stories that we see the example of angels appearing to men. (See *Heaven and Hell* numbers 76 and 84; also *Apocalypse Explained* 412:16.) Let us see from these stories what an angel was like when appearing to people on earth.

The story of Gideon begins sadly. Because the people of Israel had again done wrong and turned from the Lord, they were being miserably persecuted by the armies of the Midianites. But then one day an angel of the Lord came and sat under a tree until a man named Gideon spoke to him. To Gideon the angel looked just like a man who lives in this world. But this man spoke in such a way that Gideon thought of him as very wise and important, probably a “Surely, I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites” (*Judges 6:16*).

Gideon asked this visitor not to go away until he brought him a present, and when he brought food, the angel put it on a rock and touched it with the end of his staff. Fire then came out of the rock and consumed it, and the angel disappeared. It was only then that Gideon realized that he had seen an angel of the Lord. He wondered if he would die, and he said in prayer, “Alas, O Lord God! For I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face.” But he received the answer that he did not need to be afraid.

After this meeting with an angel, the man Gideon, who had not thought he could do anything, set out and became the deliverer of Israel. With as few as

three hundred men, he chased away the Midianite armies.

Years later the children of Israel did evil again, and this time the army that oppressed them was the army of the Philistines. The deliverance from the Philistines is the great story of Samson, which begins with the saying that a man named Manoah and his wife had no child. Then one day Manoah's wife was spoken to by an angel, who told her that she would have a son.

She went to her husband and told him that a man of God had spoken to her—a man with an unforgettable face. Although she did not know that it was an angel, she said that his face was like the face of an angel of God (*Judges* 13:6)! But she said that the man did not tell her his name.

Manoah prayed that the man would come again to tell them how they should bring up the child that would be born. And then when the woman was in the field, the angel appeared again. She went and brought Manoah her husband to see the angel. (They still did not know it was an angel.) He told them how this child, Samson, was to be specially prepared as he grew up. They were so happy that they wanted to give this stranger a present of food to eat. But he answered that they must not give him anything, but make an offering to the Lord. And as they made an offering to the Lord, and the fire blazed high, the Angel of the Lord went up in the flame of fire and did not appear again. When this happened, the two of them fell on their faces to the ground and “knew that he was the Angel of the Lord” (*Judges* 13:20, 21).

At first Manoah was afraid—the way Gideon had been afraid. But his wife said to him that he should not be afraid, because if he were going to die, he would not have been told about the son they would have and how to raise him. And so Samson was born, “and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him” (*Judges* 13:24). And he became a man of great strength who was a leader to Israel, and delivered them from the Philistines.

In these stories we see that the spiritual eyes of these people were opened so that they could see an angel and speak with him. And now we have the clear teaching of the Writings about angels. A whole number in the book *Heaven and Hell* teaches us that every angel is in a complete human form. Swedenborg was allowed many, many times to look at angels, and he says, “I have seen nothing whatever in their form different from the human form” (*Heaven and Hell* 74). And we learn that angels are wise and happy and delighted with the work they are given to do.

And finally, we know that each one of us has been born with a purpose—that we may serve the Lord's uses in this world, and eventually do so in the world to come, and become angels.