

Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Greg Warner
Associate Editor: Bob Allen
Phone: (904) 262-6626
Fax: (904) 262-7745

December 8, 1994

In this issue:

- Richard Land helps draft school prayer amendment
- Clinton bars federal funding for human embryo research
- Federal judge blocks assisted-suicide law
- Judge finds SBC leader in contempt of court
- Hark! Americans herald renewed interest in angels
- Half of all Americans believe they have guardian angels
- Angels are for real, scholars agree, but Bible fuzzy on what they do
- Little known about 'dark side' of angels
- Experts offer answers to questions about angels
- Where do angels appear in the Bible?

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
Historical Commission, SBC
Nashville, Tennessee

Richard Land helps draft school prayer amendment

By Ray Waddle

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Fueled by the Republicans' new-found power on Capitol Hill, Southern Baptists plan to leave their mark on a proposed prayer-in-schools amendment to the Constitution.

Richard Land, director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission in Nashville, Tenn., flew to Washington, D.C., Dec. 7 to meet with a Republican congressman to help draft such an amendment.

The Christian Life Commission expects its conservative, pro-family agenda to get a more sympathetic hearing in a GOP-majority Congress, Land said. The Baptist agency's sudden post-election involvement in drafting an amendment dramatizes that.

"There's some acknowledgement that we might know what's going on in the real world a little more than people who spend their lives inside the (Washington) Beltway," Land said.

Land was scheduled to meet with Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla., who is designated to draft a suitable proposal. Incoming House Speaker Newt Gingrich, also a Southern Baptist, wants Congress to vote on an amendment next year.

The Istook amendment aims to guarantee the right of individual students and groups to pray during the school day, but it would bar government from writing the prayers and would not require all students to participate.

Land's concern is that an amendment ensure that prayers are always initiated by students, not adults. As he

envisions it, students could vote on who should give prayers, when and where.

Such an amendment, he said, should also guarantee that students can speak among themselves about their beliefs during the day without fear of harassment.

Land said his office receives complaints claiming that schools prevent students from discussing faith at lunch or recess or even from carrying their Bibles or Korans.

"If we're going to have compulsory school attendance, we're not longer going to put up with discrimination against students.," he said.

"There's not perfect solution, but if an amendment is done right, it will vastly increase public support for public education."

The prayer issue has triggered emotions on both sides. An interfaith coalition -- which includes some Baptists -- has been put together to oppose any amendment.

The group said it's unnecessary because students can legally pray now -- individually, or in groups before or after school.

Brent Walker, an amendment opponent, said he prefers educating teachers about the students' rights. "An amendment will only create more mischief," said Walker, legal director at the Baptist Joint Committee, a religious liberty lobby.

Istook's press secretary, Steve Jones, confirmed the congressman met with both Land and James Smith, the Christian Life Commission's government relations director, for a discussion of "legalese," or proper constitutional wording, on Dec. 7. Jones said Istook plans on holding several such meetings and it is too early to predict when the amendment might be ready for a vote.

-30-

-- Ray Waddle is religion editor for the Tennessean in Nashville. Pam Parry contributed to this story.

Clinton bars federal funding for human embryo research

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Rejecting a recommendation by a federal advisory committee, President Clinton ordered Dec. 2 that no federal funds be spent on human embryo research.

While acknowledging that research on human embryos can benefit medical research -- including advances in in-vitro fertilization -- Clinton said the subject "raises profound ethical and moral questions as well as issues concerning the appropriate allocation of federal funds."

"I do not believe that federal funds should be used to support the creation of human embryos for research purposes and I have directed that the National Institutes of Health not allocate any resources for such research," said Clinton.

White House officials said the president's statement prohibits only the creation of embryos for federally funded research and would not prevent studies using embryos that were surplus from in-vitro fertilization clinics.

"The president's statement doesn't outlaw that," said White House press secretary Dee Dee Myers.

Clinton also announced he will establish a bioethics advisory commission to further discuss such issues.

-30-

Federal judge blocks assisted-suicide law

SALEM, Ore. (ABP) -- Oregon's new law permitting doctor-assisted suicide for the terminally ill was put on hold Dec. 7 when a federal judge issued a temporary restraining order blocking the law.

U.S. District Judge Michael Hogan issued the order the day before the controversial law was to take effect. Hogan plans to hear arguments Dec. 19 on whether the law is constitutional.

Oregon voters narrowly passed the assisted-suicide measure Nov. 8. It is the first law of its kind. Right-to-life groups and other opponents immediately attacked the law on legal grounds.

In a news story just after the Nov. 8 election, the Southern Baptist Convention's consultant on biomedical issues decried the Oregon law as "a rejection of over 2,500 years of Western medical tradition."

"Physicians have been healers, not killers," Ben Mitchell of the SBC's Christian Life Commission told Baptist Press. "The very profession of medicine is at stake in this legislation."

-30-

-- By Bob Allen

Judge finds SBC leader in contempt of court

By Bob Allen

SANFORD, Fla. (ABP) -- A judge in Sanford, Fla., ruled Dec. 7 that a member of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee and his church were in contempt of court for resisting an order to allow inspection of the church's giving records.

Circuit Judge O.H. Eaton gave the defendants, First Baptist Church of Markham Woods in Lake Mary, Fla., and Pastor Bob Parker, 10 days to make giving records and other documents available to a former church clerk who accuses Parker of wrongdoing. After Dec. 19, a \$500-a-day fine will be assessed until they comply with the court order.

After losing a lawsuit last January, the church opened some of its records to Ann Haynes, a charter member who alleges Parker wrongly usurped control of the congregation, used its non-profit status to avoid paying taxes on his \$285,000 home, and kept jewelry for himself that was left to the church as part of a \$416,000 bequest.

Parker, a member of the powerful SBC Executive Committee, has been pastor of the church since 1983.

The defendants deny any wrongdoing and claim they have turned over all pertinent information except confidential records of individual contributions, which their attorney, Thomas Ranew of Ocala, argued are constitutionally protected. He asked for a rehearing on Eaton's Nov. 2 order to open giving records, but the judge denied the request before the Dec. 7 hearing on a charge of civil contempt.

Parker could have been jailed, said Haynes' lawyer, Tim Askew of Sanford. "The judge could have chosen fines or incarceration," Askew said. "Obviously he could not incarcerate the corporation. He chose to impose the fine against both defendants."

"Obviously, if they comply before Dec. 19, there will not be a fine," Askew said.

Askew pointed out the finding was for civil contempt, which is less serious than criminal contempt. Ranew did not return a reporter's phone calls.

Judge Eaton's order allows inspection of giving records only by Haynes' agent, accountant John King of DeBary, who must maintain their confidentiality.

Haynes sued for access to church records after being voted out of the church by its deacons in August 1993 following a church split. After a trial last January, Judge Newman Brock ruled her dismissal violated the church's constitution. He ordered her reinstated, giving her the right to view church records, and assessed court costs against the defendants.

Over 15 months of litigation, the defendants' legal fees have accumulated to more than \$20,000 to date, according to court documents.

-30-

EDITORS' NOTE: The following six stories comprise a Christmas series on angels. Special artwork is available to run with the series. Please contact ABP if you are interested. (904) 262-6626.

Hark! Americans herald renewed interest in angels

By Mark Wingfield

(ABP) -- If an angel gets wings every time a bell rings -- as Clarence claims in the movie "It's a Wonderful Life" -- the constant ringing of cash registers with the sale of angel products this Christmas signals a bumper crop of angel graduates.

Angels appear everywhere this holiday season.

They're on Christmas trees and Christmas cards, to be sure. But they're also the subject of prominent displays in virtually every book store in the nation. They're on magazine covers, posters, jewelry, T-shirts and knick-knack shelves.

But if you listen closely and move beyond the cry of commercialism, you'll hear a common message resounding across religious traditions: Angels are for real.

And, ironically, the quiet message attributed to angels directly opposes the loud commercialism propelling the current angel frenzy.

"The chief message of the angels is 'Fear not,'" said Eileen Freeman, founder of Angel Watch Foundation and author of three best-selling books on angels. "God is telling us not to be afraid, and I think that is a very important message in our age. People have not turned to Jesus, but to the unholy trinity of money, power and prestige."

Freeman, a Christian raised in the Catholic faith and a graduate of Notre Dame University, founded Angel Watch two years ago as a non-profit foundation to help people search for God through the work of angels. She speaks around the nation, writes and counsels people with questions about angels.

She's not alone in this emerging cottage industry that's part spiritual and part sales. Consider these trends:

-- Five years ago, only five books about angels were in print in the United States, according to Gannett News Service. Today, at least 200 books on angels line the shelves of both religious and secular book stores. Many have become best-sellers.

-- Linda Whitman Vephula, a Baptist in Atlanta, recently launched a new nationwide magazine devoted exclusively to angels. The Angel Times is a 68-page glossy color magazine hitting national newsstands this week priced at \$5 per copy. It's not intended to be a commercial venture, she explained, but is her response to the ministry of angels.

-- Hollywood has jumped on the angel bandwagon, with several television specials and a new angel-oriented series, "Touched By An Angel." Angels are becoming a staple of the TV talk show circuit and real-life drama programs.

-- Kay Martin Curry of Virginia founded Twenty-eight Angels Inc. as a clearinghouse for angel information. Dozens of people call her toll-free line daily to report angelic encounters and seek spiritual direction. She speaks around the nation and this year sponsored her first international conference on angels and art in Italy.

-- More than 70 percent of American adults believe in angels, according to the Gallup Poll, and nearly half of all Americans believe they have a guardian angel, according to a poll for Time magazine.

People promoting angels today range all the way from the founder of the Psychic Friends Network to an ordinary Baptist minister and his wife.

This wide range of influence causes Maurice Smith, a Southern Baptist expert on New Age movements, cults and world religions, to issue a warning to curious Christians: "All of us need to be careful that we do not assume that everybody who believes in angels has the same concept of angels we have."

Since the subject of angels has not been widely discussed, Baptists have no common doctrine on the issue, he said. "Therefore, people hold many of their beliefs in a kind of popular mode. There are no guidelines. You can't go out and get the official Baptist book on angels."

This creates a strange mix whereby people who hold highly orthodox views in other areas blindly accept unorthodox views about angels, said Smith, who retired this year from the interfaith witness staff of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

For example, "Baptists traditionally have believed that angels are a created order of beings and that they are not people who have died," Smith said. "But in the popular vein, angels often are people who have died."

Another danger with the fascination with angels is the threat of universalism, Smith said. Universalism is the belief that all people will go to heaven, or that all spiritual roads lead to God.

The "folk religion" fostered by the modern discussion of angels "tends to encourage Baptists and other Christians to become universalists," Smith said. "Wherever they see angels, they tend to give them credibility."

"We see angels as a common denominator of the religions of the world," said Vephula, publisher of Angel Times. She considers herself a Christian and a Baptist but remains open to other religions.

Likewise, Curry, founder of Twenty-eight Angels Inc., identifies herself as a Christian but believes angels carry God's message to people of all faith groups. "All the religions should be working together," she said.

While people like Vephula and Curry have gotten into the angel business with an inclusive view, others have entered with a more narrow view.

Freeman, founder of Angel Watch Foundation, strongly emphasizes her ties to Catholicism and Christianity.

"I'm trying to educate people about who angels really are," she said. "There's so much information out there that is not biblically based."

For example, Freeman cites the wildly popular book by Betty Eadie, "Embraced by the Light," in which Eadie tells how her life was changed by an angelic encounter.

"I'm sure she had a genuine angel experience, but it gets mixed up with her Mormon background and strange theology," Freeman said. Some Baptist scholars have criticized Eadie's book as thinly veiled Mormon theology.

Like Freeman, Marilyn and William Webber got into the angel business with a desire to promote orthodox Christian views.

They met at Wheaton University, and he holds a doctorate from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary,

a Southern Baptist school in Kansas City, Mo. He has been pastor of several Baptist churches over the last 40 years, most recently Grand View Baptist Church in Grand Terrace, Calif.

Together, they have written "A Rustle of Angels," which has sold 200,000 copies in hardback to date. The book includes dozens of personal stories of human encounters with angels but also a strong evangelical witness.

"There are so many myths out there and New Age ideas," Marilyn Webber said. "We decided there needed to be more of a foundational idea presented."

They decided to write the book in a popular format rather than a Bible study format so it would appeal to non-Christians as well as Christians and could be sold in secular book stores, her husband added.

The book has proven to be a good bridge to Christianity for people who are not Christians but who are interested in angels, Marilyn Webber said. She and her husband also host "angel teas" in their home, to which they invite people interested in angels for discussion and ultimately to hear a Christian witness.

"Because there's such an interest in angels outside the church, it gives Christians a wonderful opportunity to use this interest as a beginning to witness," she said.

How to explain the current surge in interest with angels varies depending upon one's view of whom angels serve.

Curry, founder of Twenty-eight Angels Inc., sees the phenomenal interest as a sign of spiritual renewal across America. "This is an opportunity for us to realign our priorities and choose the pathway of the divine rather than the pathway of materialism," she said.

And she gets many calls from Baptists, she added, who are seeking a deeper level of spirituality.

Freeman, founder of Angel Watch Foundation, said the increasing interest in angels is "part of a great revival of spirituality in America."

After several decades of seeking material gain, people's spirits have become malnourished and people are "coming up for air," she said. "All over America, people are seeking God."

The Webbers also see signs of increased spiritual interest but worry that too many people may latch onto angels and not see the God the angels serve.

"Times are tough, and in tough times people are more open to the spiritual," William Webber said. "Angels are a way of finding hope and being spiritual."

"But God's angels always want to point to Jesus Christ. For many people, unfortunately, angels become an end in themselves. A person can stop short with the angels and never come face to face with the demands of the lordship of Jesus Christ."

Smith, the Southern Baptist interfaith witness expert, sees a different pattern.

"The interest in angels is a mixed signal," he asserted. "It's not necessarily a sign of spiritual awakening. As much as anything, it's a sign of spiritual confusion in this country."

-30-

Half of all Americans believe they have guardian angels

By Mark Wingfield

(ABP) -- Ten years ago, Brenda Curry was living alone in a rough neighborhood of Kansas City, Mo. One night while driving home after a church activity, a blizzard stranded her a short distance from her apartment.

Remembering her surroundings and the fact a rapist was stalking the neighborhood, she immediately closed

her eyes and prayed: "Lord, I'm scared. Please help me."

Two men suddenly appeared at her car window. One was white; one was black. Both appeared to be in their 30s, she recalled, and both looked like they could blend in with the street population in downtown Kansas City.

But instead of being afraid, "the strangest peace came over me," said Curry, a Southern Baptist who now lives in Kentucky. "The first man said, 'I'm your guardian angel. Where do you need to go?'

"I said I lived just a half a block up the road. He said, 'OK, we'll give you a push.'"

The man also instructed her, "Don't stop, and don't look back."

The men pushed the car to Curry's building, and she immediately got out to thank them. But by the time she opened the car door to speak, the men were gone.

The men left no footprints, and no tire tracks appeared in the snow. And she had parked in a large open area with no hiding places, she said.

Curry immediately believed the man's statement that he was her guardian angel, she said.

"I've been a Christian for many years, and I was raised to believe I had a guardian angel to watch over me," she said. "But I never expected to have an encounter.

"I guess I really believe I was about to be in a dangerous situation. They knew if I stayed stuck in the snow there, someone would come and harm me."

Curry also believes the message of "Don't stop and don't look back" had a double meaning.

At the time, she was newly divorced and trying to start over. That advice provided encouragement to her then and to this day, she said. "Every time I get in a bad situation, I remember, 'Don't stop and don't look back.'"

Was the man really her guardian angel? And do guardian angels really exist?

A growing number of Americans believe the answer to both questions is yes. Dozens of books on the market today are filled with similar stories of human encounters with angels, mainly "guardian" angels who rescue people from peril.

Major national polls have found about 70 percent of American adults believe in angels. A national poll by Yankelovich Partners Inc. for Time magazine last year found 46 percent of Americans believe they have a guardian angel and 32 percent believe they have felt an angelic presence in their lives.

The Barna Research Group reports 77 percent of Americans believe unseen spiritual forces affect the material world.

Belief in guardian angels transcends the world's faiths, but in Christianity the belief has been more prominent among Catholics than Protestants.

Billy Graham affirms the work of angels in people's lives but stops short of fully endorsing the idea of guardian angels. "If you are a believer, expect powerful angels to accompany you in your life experiences," he wrote in his 1975 bestseller "Angels: God's Secret Agents."

However, "The most important characteristic of angels is not that they have power to exercise control over me, or that they are beautiful, but that they work on our behalf," Graham also wrote.

Marilynn and William Webber, Baptists who have written a fast-selling book on angels, affirm the presence of guardian angels. Both cite personal experiences where they believe guardian angels saved them from certain death.

Kay Martin Curry, founder of Twenty-eight Angels Inc., a Virginia-based clearinghouse for angel information, definitely believes in guardian angels.

"Everyone has a guardian angel assigned to them from the moment of creation. Sometimes there are other angels as well that accompany us," said Curry (no relation to Brenda Curry), who describes herself as a Christian. "If everybody could really connect with their guardian angel, their relationship with Christ would be enhanced, not hindered."

James Leo Garrett, theology professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas

cites three Scripture passages that support the idea of angels acting as guardians.

In Matthew 18:10, Jesus warns his disciples, "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father, who is in heaven."

In Luke 16:22, Jesus tells the parable of the rich man and Lazarus and notes "the beggar died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom."

In Acts 12, an "angel of the Lord" rescues Peter from prison, and when Peter reappears later, his followers mistakenly think the person is his angel.

While biblical evidence may be found to support the idea of guardian angels, many Protestant scholars warn that an over-emphasis on guardian angels can be damaging.

It is dangerous to rely so heavily on a belief in angels that the need for Jesus is reduced, said Cary Newman, who teaches New Testament at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville.

Newman, who has studied angelology extensively, said he has trouble with the idea of "angels watching over me."

"Christ is watching over me," Newman asserted. "If it's only angels watching over me, then I'm in real trouble."

While affirming the existence of guardian angels, the Webbers also address this concern in their book.

"What does the Bible say about how you can see an angel? Absolutely nothing!" they write. "And this must be significant. If God wanted us to see our guardian angel, he surely would have given us the instructions in the Bible, the place we turn for guidance in spiritual matters."

-30-

Angels are for real, scholars agree, but Bible fuzzy on what they do

By Mark Wingfield

(ABP) -- Angels appear throughout the Bible, but Christians in this century -- particularly Protestants -- have been hesitant to talk about them or study them.

In 1975, Billy Graham was preparing a sermon on angels and discovered scant resources in his library on the topic.

So he researched and wrote his own book, called "Angels: God's Secret Agents." It became a national best-seller and now has returned to prominence. This fall, it was the fourth-best-selling non-fiction hardback book in Christian book stores nationwide.

Graham's book and interviews with several theologians and students of angelology provide a basic outline of orthodox Christian beliefs about angels. But the subject still has few clearly defined parameters of what is orthodox and what is not.

Baptist scholars generally agree on at least three points, however:

-- Angels are an obvious part of Scripture, and their existence cannot be denied.

-- The role of angels is not clearly described in the Bible.

-- The Bible affirms the existence of both good angels and fallen angels, or demons.

"There's a great deal of ambiguity, and I think purposely so," said Gerald Keown, an Old Testament professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. "We do not have a clear-cut biblical perspective that would define the role of angels. I think this is a subject intentionally left shrouded in mystery."

One of his colleagues, New Testament professor Cary Newman, believes the mystery of angels also may

have been left a mystery to avoid the human temptation to worship angels over Jesus Christ.

Even most Christian-oriented people on the modern angel-promotion circuit readily acknowledge this danger. The Bible includes several instances, they note, where people who attempt to worship angels are rebuked.

The most notable example is recorded in Revelation 22, where the Apostle John, upon being returned to the island of Patmos after his revelation of end times, falls down to worship the angel who has escorted him. "Do not do it," the angel says. "Worship God."

Angels are essentially good beings who may be used for evil purposes, Newman said. "I wouldn't pray to an angel; I pray to Jesus. I don't seek the enablement of an angel; I seek the enablement of the living Christ. ... Anything you appeal to an angel to do, Christ does better."

Newman said as a pastor he would not preach a sermon series on angels or encourage his congregation to become fascinated with angels because of the danger of angel worship. "I want them to fall in love with the risen Christ" rather than angels, he said.

Another New Testament scholar, Clint Arnold of Biola University, believes angel worship was the sin of the Colossian church that prompted the Apostle Paul to write them with further instruction.

In Colossians 2:18, Paul writes: "Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head"

Arnold has studied every available fragment from Asia Minor with an inscription related to angels that was written during Paul's time. His research and view of the Colossian heresy will be published in a forthcoming book titled "The Colossian Syncretism."

Both the Hebrew and Greek words translated "angel" literally mean "messenger." The word is used 111 times in the Old Testament and at least 165 times in the New Testament, according to James Leo Garrett, theology professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

"The history of Christianity really has mixed reviews of angels," said Timothy Weber, church history professor at Southern Seminary. "The Catholic tradition made angels an important part of Christian piety and talked a lot about guardian angels.

"Protestants tended to look at all the angelic hosts ... as taking away from the biblical revelation in many ways. They said, 'If you've got the Holy Spirit and you've got the Bible, why do you need angels?'

"They didn't deny angels; they just didn't know what to do with them."

-30-

Little known about 'dark side' of angels

By Mark Wingfield

(ABP) -- If the subject weren't so deadly serious, it might be the caption to a Far Side cartoon: "Angels gone bad."

While the Bible affirms the existence of angels of light, it also acknowledges angels of darkness.

And while the Bible paints an incomplete picture of angels of light, it provides even less information about angels of darkness, or demons.

Those who promote the existence of God's angels at work in the world today quickly acknowledge the existence of other spiritual forces as well, often called "fallen angels."

"There are fallen angels," said Kay Martin Curry, founder of Twenty-eight Angels Inc., a national

clearinghouse for angel information. "They are the ones that do not carry the light of God."

"There are good angels, and there are angels who have been turned to the dark side," affirmed Cary Newman, New Testament professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. "This seems to me to be a New Testament teaching."

Although many different theories are offered to explain the existence of Satan, the Bible gives a few clues. Ezekiel 28, for example, talks about Lucifer falling from the position of "guardian cherub" to a corrupt state.

Many Christian scholars believe Lucifer fell from heaven because of his pride and desire to be like God himself. This view says God expelled Lucifer and thousands of his angelic followers with him. Lucifer became Satan.

Revelation 12 talks about a "war in heaven" in which the archangel Michael and his angels fought Satan. "The great dragon was hurled down -- that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him."

The Bible strongly affirms the teaching that Satan and his followers are less powerful than God and ultimately will be destroyed.

In their book "The Rustle of Angels," William and Marilyn Webber offer this reminder: "Take courage, for although there is a spiritual struggle, good and evil are not evenly matched. God is the Creator; Satan is a created being. God is all-powerful; the devil's power is limited. ... Satan will not be able to thwart God's plan. God will triumph, and Satan will be defeated."

The Webbers, who have had a lifelong ministry in Baptist churches, offer their readers six ways to discern between good angels and bad:

- "God and the holy angels will never tell you anything that is contrary to what is found in the Bible."
- "A message from God's angels will always be in the spirit of Christ."
- "A genuine encounter with an angel will always glorify God, not the angel."
- "Angels ordinarily leave a person with an unexplainable sense of peace and a greater love for God."
- "God's angels do not act to grant one person's selfish desires to the detriment of others."
- "Prayer should be used to confirm the genuineness of an encounter with an angel."

-30-

Experts offer answers to questions about angels

Q. Where did angels come from?

A. Most Christian scholars believe angels are spiritual beings created by God, although the Bible does not clearly state when and how angels were created. Baptist theologian James Leo Garrett in his "Systematic Theology" notes, "The specific divine creation of angels, although assumed in the doctrine of the creation of all things, is not formally taught in the Bible."

Q. What do angels look like?

A. Angels are spirit beings, "minds without physical bodies," according to Marilyn and William Webber, Baptists and authors of "The Rustle of Angels." However, when angels do appear to humans, they usually take on human forms "most characteristic of those living in that area," the Webbers add.

However, angels sometimes appear in different forms, such as brilliant light, according to the Webbers and other scholars.

"Apparently angels have a beauty and variety that surpass anything known to men," Billy Graham wrote in his 1975 book, "Angels: God's Secret Agents." Graham says he understands the Bible to teach that angels do not age, are sexless and never die.

Q. Can humans who have died come back to earth in the form of angels?

A. While this idea has been popularized on television and in movies, it is rejected by most Christian scholars. "Many people are comforted by the thought that their child who has died has become an angel," the Webbers note in their book. "According to the Bible, angels are not humans who have died, whether babies or adults."

Q. How do angels differ from humans?

A. Most Christian scholars believe angels are a different order of creation than humans. The Webbers note that humans are born but angels are created directly by God.

Graham notes that while Christians are joint heirs with Jesus through redemption, angels are not. "God is not called 'Father' by the holy angels because, not having sinned, they need not be redeemed. And the fallen angels cannot call God 'Father' because they cannot be redeemed."

Q. How many angels are there?

A. The Bible uses terms such as "thousands upon thousands" and "10,000 times 10,000" to describe an infinite number of angels.

Q. Where do angels live?

A. "The Bible repeatedly uses the phrase 'the angels in heaven,'" the Webbers note in their book. "Heaven may be considered a home for the angels, but the answer may not be quite that simple. There is a difference of opinion about the heaven where the holy angels live."

Q. Are there different kinds of angels?

A. The Bible seems to indicate different types of angels, ranging from cherubs to archangels. Different views exist on how many types of angels there are and how organized they may be. Some people have worked out elaborate charts of angel hierarchies, while others dismiss such organization as unbiblical.

Q. What do angels do?

A. The word angel literally means "messenger," and most scholars believe angels are God's messengers to humans.

In his "Systematic Theology," Garrett outlines five primary functions of angels mentioned in the Bible: worship of God; obedient service of God; interpretation of the word and will of God; serving as special agents to support God's plan for salvation; and guardianship of human beings.

The Webbers list at least 14 functions of angels: worship God, administer God's government, rejoice when sinners repent, serve as guardian angels, do battle for God, carry out God's justice, give encouragement, strengthen people, serve as messengers, help people realize they have been cleansed from sin, guide and direct the thoughts of people, help bring people to salvation, watch how humans live their lives, escort dying people to heaven.

Q. How does the work of angels differ from the work of the Holy Spirit?

A. This is a "tough question," according to Eileen Freeman, founder of Angel Watch Foundation, author of three books on angels and a graduate of Notre Dame University with a master's degree in sacred Scriptures.

"The work of the Holy Spirit is a universal work that angels don't have," Freeman suggested. "Angels seem

to bring rather specific kinds of messages for specific actions or parts in our lives. The work of the Holy Spirit is kind of like blanketing the whole earth."

Cary Newman, New Testament professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, admits this question is one reason he is cautious about emphasizing the role of angels too much. The emphasis of the New Testament is on Jesus and the cross, not on angels, he said. "Christianity is exclusively Christological."

He added: "The work of the Holy Spirit is basically the resurrection Spirit of Christ. The Spirit is the way Christ works in me. If I'm going to have an interpretive grid for something happening in my life, I'm going to do it through Christ in me, which is the Spirit."

Q. Why do angels not always protect humans from harm?

A. "We have searched for, but we have not been able to find, the pattern that explains why God at times has his angels intervene and at other times does not," the Webbers reply. "The Bible teaches that God sends his rain on the just and the unjust alike. God is sovereign, and for reasons of his own may have his angels help the unjust. He is not obligated to explain to us why he chooses to have his angelic hosts help one person and not another, or to rescue in one circumstance but not in another."

Q. Who is the "Angel of the Lord" referred to in the Old Testament?

A. The phrase "the Angel of the Lord" appears in at least 16 chapters of the Old Testament, including pivotal appearances to the patriarchs, such as Moses at the burning bush. In his "Systematic Theology," Garrett offers four possible interpretations of this difficult biblical concept: that the Angel of the Lord is the pre-existent Logos who would later become incarnate in Jesus Christ; that the Angel of the Lord was an angel acting as the ambassador of the Lord; that "Angel of Yahweh" is a literary device perhaps referring to God; and that the Angel of the Lord is God himself.

Q. Are angels a part of other religions besides Christianity?

A. Yes. Angels appear prominently in the literature of Judaism and Islam, as well as other religions. They also figure prominently in New Age movements. Authors of many current books on angels cite this commonality as evidence that all religions should unite.

But Maurice Smith, who recently retired from the interfaith witness department of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, warns the transcendence of angels across religious traditions can lead Christians to adopt universalism, the belief that all religions lead to God or that all people eventually will be redeemed by God. All religions do not lead to the same God, he said, and not everyone's understanding of angels is the same.

-30-

Where do angels appear in the Bible?

- Genesis 16. The "Angel of the Lord" comforts Hagar as she flees from Abraham and Sarah.
- Genesis 22. The "Angel of the Lord" stops Abraham from sacrificing his son Isaac.
- Genesis 19. Angels go to Sodom to lead Lot and his family away before the city is destroyed.
- Genesis 24. Abraham tells Isaac an angel will help him find a wife.
- Genesis 28. Jacob sees the angels of God ascending and descending into heaven in a dream.
- Genesis 31. An angel speaks to Jacob, telling him to flee from Laban, his father-in-law.

- Exodus 3. The "Angel of the Lord" appears to Moses in the burning bush.
- Exodus 14. An angel goes before and after the camp of Israel as they fled Egypt.
- Exodus 23, 32 & 33. An angel leads the children of Israel as they journey to the Promised Land.
- Numbers 22. The "Angel of the Lord" appears to Balaam and gets his attention through the antics of a donkey.
- Judges 6. The "Angel of the Lord" appears to Gideon.
- Judges 13. The "Angel of the Lord" appears to the wife of Manoah and tells her she will bear the child Samson.
- 2 Samuel 24. An angel destroys Jerusalem through a plague.
- 2 Kings 19. The "Angel of the Lord" kills 185,000 Assyrians.
- Zechariah 1, 2, 4, 5 & 6. An angel converses with the prophet.
- Daniel 3. An angel rescues Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego from the fiery furnace.
- Daniel 6. An angel saved Daniel from the lion's den.
- Daniel 8. The angel Gabriel interprets a dream for Daniel.
- Daniel 10. The angel Michael appears to Daniel.
- Ezekiel 10. The cherubim are identified as surrounding the throne of God.
- Luke 1. The angel Gabriel announces the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah and the birth of Jesus to Mary.
- Matthew 1. An angel announces to Joseph the virginal conception of Mary's child.
- Luke 2. The angels praised God at the birth of Jesus.
- Mark 1. Angels ministered to Jesus after his wilderness temptations.
- Luke 16. Poor man Lazarus is carried to Abraham's bosom by angels.
- Luke 22. An angel appears to strengthen Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- Matthew 28. An angel rolls away the stone of Jesus' tomb.
- Acts 5. An angel opens the prison doors to free the apostles.
- Acts 8. An angel directs Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch.
- Revelation. An angel transports John to heaven to reveal a vision of the end times, in which angels appear in numerous forms.

-30-

END