
The Doctrine of Angels

Holy Angels

Various Passages

“The Reverend John G. Paton, a missionary in the New Hebrides Islands, tells a thrilling story involving the protective care of angels. Hostile natives surrounded his mission headquarters one night, intent on burning the Patons out and killing them. John Paton and his wife prayed all during that terror-filled night that God would deliver them. When daylight came they were amazed to see the attackers unaccountably leave. They thanked God for delivering them.

A year later, the chief of the tribe was converted to Jesus Christ, and Mr. Paton, remembering what had happened, asked the chief what had kept him and his men from burning down the house and killing them. The chief replied in surprise, “Who were all those men you had with you there?” The missionary answered, “There were no men there; just my wife and I.” The chief argued that they had seen many men standing guard—hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords in their hands. They seemed to circle the mission station so that the natives were afraid to attack. Only then did Mr. Paton realize that God had sent his angels to protect them. The chief agreed that there was no other explanation. Could it be that God had sent a legion of angels to protect His servants, whose lives were being endangered?”¹

This illustration was taken from Billy Graham’s book on angels. It certainly sounds familiar, doesn’t it?

“When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. “Oh, my lord, what shall we do?” the servant asked. “Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed, “O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.” Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (1 Kings 6:14-17).

Once again we are going to take a pause between biblical studies and consider some of the basic doctrines of the church. Over the next three weeks we will be looking at the doctrine of angels.

This study will encompass three parts. This week we will look at “Holy Angels.” Over the remaining two weeks we will consider “Satan and his Fallen Angels.” As with all of these studies, these are more in the nature of surveys or introductions to the subjects as opposed to in-depth examinations.

My primary source for these studies is Through the Bible in One Year² and a number of secondary sources including Angels, God’s Secret Agents by Billy Graham.

¹ Graham, Billi, Angels, God’s Secret Agents, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, NY, 1975, p. 2-3.

² Stringfellow, Alan B., ed., Through the Bible in One Year, Vol. 3, Great Truths of the Bible, Copyright © 1981 by Virgil W. Hensley, Inc., Publisher, Tulsa, OK, p. 73-91.

I Introduction: First, we must start with one basic truth: Angels, God’s creation, include angels, demons and Satan. These beings are all angels. That being the case, it couldn’t hurt to get a definition of the word angel.

*“ANGEL (Gr. angelos, messenger). A supernatural, heavenly being, a little higher in dignity than man. Their creation (Ps 148:2-5; Col 1:16) was certainly before the creation of man (Job 38:7). They are described as “spirits” (Heb 1:14).”*³

“Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts. Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created” (Psalm 148:2-5).

“For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him” (Colossians 1:16).

“... the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy” (Job 38:7).

“Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14).

*“The Hebrew and Greek translate the word “angel” as “messenger, ambassador, minister.” The term “angel” is not a personal name, but a title describing the office. The “angel” is always used in the masculine gender, through sex, in the human sense, is never ascribed to angels.”*⁴

II “Holy Angels”: Now we are going to look at some of the basic truths regarding angels in general and specifically the righteous angels.

A The Creation of Angels: Angels were created by God. They were created before the creation of mankind. They were created prior to the creation of the earth.

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4-7).

B The Form & Nature of Angels: It is important to realize there are significant misunderstandings about angels. These misunderstandings can affect how one perceives both angels and demons. To clarify, we will look at who they are and what they aren’t.

1. Angels are spirits. This means they are not male, though when manifesting visibility they appear so. This means they have no true physical body. It also means they have no sexuality as we understand it. They don’t reproduce and they don’t interact sexually with humans, which puts an end to some of the more bizarre stories about demons.

³ Douglas, J. D. and Merrill C. Tenney, editors, NIV Bible Dictionary, Zondervan Interactive Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1989

⁴ Stringfellow, p. 73.

“Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14).

“The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:34-36).

2. As already noted, Angels have the ability to manifest a physical form, which ...

“The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be” (Luke 1:28-29).

3. Angels appear in a male form or at least we can say that masculine pronouns are used when describing them.

“There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay” (Matthew 28:2-6).

4. They are spirits, so they do not die.

“But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:26).

5. They dwell in “the Heavens.”

“Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders” (Revelation 5:11).

6. They are subject to God

“Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word” (Psalm 103:20).

7. And, they possess power and might.

“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s

wrists. Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating”” (Acts 12:5-11).

C The Classification of Angels: The organization of angels is much like the military. They have ranks and authority. Billy Graham introduces the subject this way.

“ Though some see the ranking of celestial powers of conjectural, it seems to follow this pattern: archangels, angels, seraphim, cherubim, principalities, authorities, powers, thrones, might and dominion (Colossians 1:16; Romans 8:38).

Medieval theologians divided angelic beings in to nine grades. Some people, however, have asked whether some of these grades—the principalities, authorities, powers, thrones, might and dominion—could not refer to human institutions and human beings. To answer, we must understand Colossians 1:16. Paul is speaking about creation of things both seen and unseen. On this verse Matthew Henry says that Christ “made all things out of nothing, the highest angel in heaven as well as men upon earth. He made the world, the upper and lower world, with all the inhabitants of both....He [Paul] speaks here as if there were several orders of angels: ‘Whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers, which must signify either different degrees of excellence or different offices and employments.’ Perhaps any list that ranks angelic beings will err, but we can be sure they differ in power, some having authority others do not possess. While I do not wish to be dogmatic, I think there are different ranks of them and that the list given in Colossians does refer to these celestial personalities.”⁵

1. *“Cherubim (Plural of Cherub). The first appearance of the Cherubim is in the Garden of Eden, where God placed them to guard the way of the “Tree of Life” from fallen Adam (Genesis 3:24).⁶*

“After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life”

2. *“The Seraphim. This is a plural word appearing only once in Scripture. In Isaiah’s vision, he saw the Seraphim—meaning “burners,” surrounding the throne of God.”⁷*

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.” Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he

⁵ Graham, 49-50.

⁶ Stringfellow, p. 75.

⁷ Ibid.

had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”” (Isaiah 6:1-8).

3. Archangel – There is only one being identified as an archangel, this is Michael. “His name means “who is like unto God.” He is the messenger of law and judgment.”⁸ There are two other angels named, but not identified as archangels. These are Gabriel, who came to Daniel, Zacharias and Mary, and Lucifer, who we will discuss next week.

“But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince. “At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered” (Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1).

D The Ministry of Angels: In this last section I want to focus on the role of angels in our lives. There are other aspects to their ministries: their service of God, their part in the work of Christ on earth, etc. But these you will have to study on your own.

There is one other aspect to the role of angels which we won't go into here, and that is their involvement serving the Lord in His judgment. In the past, this was seen in the destruction of Sodom. In the future they will be occupied with God's final judgment.

The area of involvement of angels with humanity has been the subject of numerous books, Frank Peretti's come to mind. Most of these are biblically unsound. They can actually create problems with those who are superstitious in their approach to angels, demons and spiritual warfare. And we are all aware of the obsession of “New Age” thinkers about angels. As one reads the related books, one can come to the conclusion they are talking to fallen angels.

1. Angels reveal God's will to men.

“Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John”” (Luke 1:11-13).

2. They minister to the Saints.

“Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14)

⁸ Ibid.

3. They encourage believers

“Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’” (Acts 27:23-24).

4. They care for the wellbeing of believers.

“The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them” (Psalm 34:7).

“For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways” (Psalm 91:11).

“See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:10).

The warning when discussing angels is to avoid going beyond what is said by scripture. At the same time, we need to remember that in the midst of spiritual warfare, God’s messengers, His angels, are involved and are available to minister to us as he directs.

Let me end as I began with an illustration for Billy Graham’s book.

“It was a tragic night in a Chinese city. Bandits had surrounded the mission compound sheltering hundreds of women and children. On the previous night the missionary, Miss Monsen, had been put to bed with a bad attack of malaria, and how the tempter harassed her with the questions: “What will you do when the looters come here? When firing begins on this compound, what about those promises you have been trusting?” In his book, 1000 New Illustrations (Zondervan, 1960), Al Bryant records the result. Miss Monsen prayed, “Lord, I have been teaching these young people all these years that thy promises are true, and if they fail now, my mouth shall be forever closed; I must go home.”

Throughout the next night she was up, ministering to frightened refugees, encouraging them to pray and to trust God to deliver them. Through fearful things happened all around, the bandits left the mission compound untouched.

In the morning, people from three different neighborhood families asked Miss Monsen, “Who were those four people, three sitting and one standing, quietly watching from the top of your house all night long?” When she told them that no one had been on the housetop, they refused to believe her, saying, “We saw them with our own eyes!” She then told them that God still sent angels to guard his children in their hour of danger.”⁹

⁹ Graham, p. 168-169.

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Various Passages

I Introduction:

(1 Kings 6:14-17; Psalm 148:2-5; Colossians 1:16; Job 38:7; Hebrews 1:14)

II “Holy Angels”:

A The Creation of Angels:

(Job 38:4-7)

B The Form & Nature of Angels:

1. Angels are spirits.
(Hebrews 1:14; Luke 20:34-36)
2. Angels manifest a physical form.
(Luke 1:28-29)
3. Masculine pronouns are used when describing angels.
(Matthew 28:2-6)
4. Being Spirit, they do not die.
(Luke 20:26)
5. They dwell in “the Heavens.”
(Revelation 5:11)

6. They are subject to God
(*Psalm 103:20*)

7. And, they possess power and might.
(*Acts 12:5-11*)

C The Classification of Angels:

1. Cherubim
(*Genesis 3:24*)

2. Seraphim
(*Isaiah 6:1-8*)

3. Archangel
(*Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1*)

D The Ministry of Angels:

1. They reveal _____ will to _____.
(*Luke 1:11-13*)

2. They _____ to the _____.
(*Hebrews 1:14*)

3. They _____ _____
(*Acts 27:23-24*)

4. They care for the _____ of _____.
(*Psalm 34:7, 91:11; Matthew 18:10*)