

## Lesson #2

### The Existence and Activity of Angels

The problem of *evangelical deism* – For many years I readily acknowledged the *existence* of both holy angels and fallen demonic spirits, but relegated their *activity* to the pages of the Bible. As one who affirms biblical authority, I couldn't deny the reality of such beings, but as an evangelical deist, they played little if any role in the daily affairs of my life. Angels and demons were fine (in a manner of speaking), but only if they remained tucked safely away inside the two covers of my Bible. That I should ever encounter an angelic being, or a demonic one, was not something I expected and something that I would have quickly explained away lest I be regarded as theologically naïve or given to charismatic sensationalism. I hope these lessons in spiritual warfare will awaken all of us to the inescapable reality of angelic and demonic activity and the necessity of our preparation for the battle in which we are engaged.

[This lesson is concerned primarily with the holy angels and does not address the properties, personality or activities of demonic spirits.]

#### 8 Questions concerning Angels

- (1) *Do they really exist, and if they do, does it really matter?*
  - a. The word "angel" (*angelos*) occurs in 34 of the 66 books of the Bible: 108x in OT and over 165x in NT = @ 275 x in the Bible.
  - b. Jesus believed in and experienced the ministry of angels: (1) his conception was announced by an angel (Gabriel); (2) his birth was announced by angels; (3) he was tempted by a fallen angel; (4) he was ministered to by angels subsequent to the temptation; (5) his teaching is filled with references to angelic beings; (6) he experienced the ministry of angels in Gethsemane; (7) he could have appealed to twelve legions of angels (Mt. 26:53); (8) they were present at his tomb following the resurrection; (9) they were present at his ascension. The point is that angels were an integral part of Christ's birth, life, ministry, teaching, death, resurrection, ascension, and will accompany him at his second advent.

*To deny the reality of the angelic world is to undermine the integrity of Jesus himself.*
  - c. Consider the witness/testimony/experience of countless Christians . . .
- (2) *Where did they come from?*
  - a. Angels, no less than humans, were *created* at a point in time. Ps. 148:2-5; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16. Each angel is a direct creation: i.e., they did not descend from an original pair as we did; they do not procreate as we do (Mt. 22:28-30).
  - b. *When* were angels created? Most likely they were created before the events of Gen. 1:1ff. See Job 38:4-7.
  - c. In what *moral state* were they created? They must have been created righteous and upright for the simple fact that God does not directly create evil. Several texts assert or imply an original act of rebellion (Rev. 12; Col. 1).
- (3) *What are they like?*
  - a. personality

The basic elements of personality are intellect, emotion, will, self-consciousness, self-determination, a sense of moral obligation (i.e., conscience) and the power to pursue it, etc. Angels certainly are intelligent but not omniscient (1 Pt. 1:12; Mk. 13:32), experience emotion (Job 38:7; Luke 15:10; Rev. 4-5), and exercise their wills (Rev. 12).

Were angels created *in the image and likeness of God*? The image of God entails, among other things, personality, dominion, capacity for relationship, self-consciousness, etc.

b. properties

1. *spirit beings* - immaterial, incorporeal; no flesh or blood or bones; they are "ministering spirits" (Heb. 1:14).

Although they are spirits, they have spatial limitations, i.e., they are not omnipresent. See Dan. 9:21-23; 10:10-14 where we find both spatial movement and temporal limitations.

2. *spirit bodies* - in some sense of the word they have "bodies," though not of a physical nature; i.e., they are spatially confined (their "form" or "shape" is not distributed throughout space); they are localized.

Do angels have literal "wings"? Isa. 6:2,6; Ezek. 1:5-8; Gabriel is portrayed as flying to Daniel's side (9:21; cf. Rev. 14:6-7).

3. *gender/sex* - Mt. 22:28-30; hence they do not procreate; they are always described in the masculine gender (but see Zech. 5:9).

4. *immortality* - they are not inherently immortal, but derivatively (Lk. 20:36)

c. powers

1. they are able to assume the form and appear as humans: a) to the naked eye (Lk. 1:11-13; 1:26-29; Mt. 28:1-7); b) in visions and dreams (Mt. 1:20; Isa. 6); c) in the form of a man (Gen. 18:1-8; in this case they were sufficiently "real" in their appearance that the homosexuals in S & G lusted after them; see also Mark 16:5); d) other forms (Dan. 10:5-6; Mt. 28:3; Rev. 4:6-8).

Reactions to angelic appearances: mental and emotional agitation; fear; loss of composure; etc.

2. all angelic power is subject to God's power and purpose (Ps. 103:20; 2 Pt. 2:11).

Gen. 19:12-16 (used of God to destroy S & G); 2 Kings 19:35 (one angel killed 185,000 Assyrians); Mt. 28:2 (an angel moved the stone from Christ's tomb); Acts 12 (an angel entered a locked prison and released Peter); Acts 12:23 (an angel killed Herod); Rev. 7:2-3 (angels influence the phenomena of nature); Mt. 24:31 (angels gather the saints at Christ's second coming).

d. position

Angels are of two moral orders or categories: elect/holy (Mk. 8:38; 1 Tim. 5:21) and evil (Lk. 8:2). Evidently, after the rebellion/fall of Satan and his hosts, all angels were *confirmed* in their moral state: God preserves the elect/holy angels and will not redeem the evil ones. **Why do we deny the possibility of redemption for fallen angelic beings?** (1) there is no record of such in Scripture; (2) there is no record in Scripture of demonic repentance; (3) the impact of the cross on demons is always portrayed as judgment, never salvation (nowhere do we read of justification,

forgiveness, redemption, adoption, regeneration, etc. being true of any angelic being); (4) Hebrews 2:14-17; Rev. 5:8-14.

4. *What are they called?*

- a. "angel" = messenger (Heb. *Mal'akh* and Gk. *Angelos*)
- b. "ministers" = serving God (Ps. 104:4)
- c. "hosts" = God's army
- d. "watchers" = Dan. 4:13,17 (supervisors employed by God in governing the world); however, in some inter-testamentary writings such as the book of Jubilees and the Dead Sea Scrolls the word "watchers" is used for evil spirits, not angels.
- e. "sons of the Mighty" = Ps. 89:6
- f. "sons of God" = Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7
- g. "holy ones" = Ps. 89:6-7

Special classifications or categories or kinds of angelic beings:

*Cherubim* - the highest order or rank; splendor, power, beauty; they guard Eden and prevent man's return (Gen. 3:24); they hover above the mercy seat (Ex. 25:17-22; cf. Heb. 9:5 = "cherubim of glory"); see also Ezek. 1:1,28; 10:4,18-22. Cherubim are never explicitly called "angels" because they are not messengers: they proclaim and protect the glory and holiness of God.

*Seraphim* - lit., "burning ones" (Isa. 6); the name speaks of their consuming devotion to God; they are "afire" or "ablaze" with adoration of God; their principal task is worship.

*Living Creatures* - Rev. 4:6-9; they could be either cherubim or seraphim or another class altogether.

Only two angels are named: a) Michael = lit., "who is like God?" in Dan. 10:13,20; he is assigned to protect Israel; he is the "archangel" (Jude 9) and the leader of the angelic host in their war against Satan (Rev. 12:7); b) Gabriel = lit., "mighty one of God" in Dan. 9:21; Luke 1:26; in each appearance he communicates or interprets divine revelation concerning God's kingdom purposes.

In the apocryphal book of Tobit, another angel is named: Raphael. If one includes 2 Esdras under the apocryphal books, another name occurs: Uriel.

*The Angel of the Lord* - also called "the angel of God" or "the angel of the presence" (Gen. 22:9-18; Ps. 34:7; etc.). Was this the pre-incarnate Logos, the second person of the Trinity, or was he merely a created angelic being? On occasion this angel is distinguished from the Lord and sometimes, even in the same passage, he is identified with the Lord. In the account of confronting Hagar (Gen. 16) the angel of the Lord speaks to her in the first person: "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count" (v. 10). Hagar even identifies him as "the God who sees" (v. 13). The angel says to Jacob, "I am the God of Bethel" (Gen. 31:13). However, Abraham clearly distinguishes the angel from God: "He [God] will send His angel before you" (Gen. 24:7). It was "the angel of the Lord" who appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Exod. 3:2; cf. Acts 7:35,38), yet it was clearly God himself whom Moses encountered (Exod. 3:13-14).

Arguments for identifying the angel of the Lord with the Lord himself: (1) the angel explicitly identifies himself with the Lord on several occasions; (2) those to whom he makes his presence

known often identify and speak of him as divine; (3) the biblical authors often explicitly refer to him as "the Lord."

Arguments for identifying the angel of the Lord with a created spirit being: (1) God often so completely invests and authorizes his ambassadors or representatives with his character and word that they become indistinguishable from Him when they speak His message (see Exod. 23:21); (2) the OT prophets display this kind of identity with God when they identify His message with their message; (3) the "angel of the Lord" appears in the NT *subsequent* to the incarnation and thus would have to be regarded as someone/something other than the second person of the Trinity; "yet his actions (for example, Acts 12:7,15) are also described as an act of the Lord himself, and he sometimes speaks in the first person for the Lord himself (Rev. 22:6,7,12)" (Andrew Bandstra, *In the Company of Angels*, 49-50).

#### 5. *How many angels are there?*

A "multitude" announced Jesus' birth (Lk. 2:13-15). God is Yahweh "of hosts" (Ps. 46:7,11, et.al), i.e., He is head over a vast army of angels. Jesus refers to "twelve legions" of angels (Mt. 26:53) and a legion = 6,000, hence 72,000 angels. Often angels are associated with the stars, leading some to suggest they are equal in number (Job 38:7; Ps. 148:1-3; Rev. 9:1-2; 12:3-4,7-9).

Some suggest that since each angel is a guardian of a Christian (Heb. 1:14), the number of Christians = the number of angels. It has even been argued that Jesus won't return until enough people are saved to correspond to each angel! But, no text says that every angel serves in this capacity. Many, it would seem, never leave the throne of God (see Rev. 4-5).

Regardless of how many there are, their number seems to be fixed, for they neither procreate nor die (Mt. 22:28-30; Lk. 20:36). Rev. 5:11 refers to "myriads" (a "myriad" = 10,000), but nothing here suggests that these are all the angels there are. See Dan. 7:10 ("thousands upon thousands and myriads upon myriads"); Deut. 33:2 ("10,000 holy ones"); Jude 14.

#### 6. *How are they organized?*

a. Michael = "archangel" (a word found only in 1 Thess. 4:16 and Jude 9) = chief or first; in Rev. 12 he is head of the angelic host. See Dan. 10:13.

b. Job 1:6 and 2:1 indicate that there was a regular, periodic assembly of the angels. Cf. Ps. 89:5-6 ("the assembly of the holy ones"). Why? Perhaps to report on service, receive instructions, etc. (Ps. 103:20-21).

c. The fact that there are different classes or categories or types of angels would imply some form of organization.

d. Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10,15. Here we find six terms and thus perhaps six classes or categories of angelic (demonic) beings.

1) principalities/rulers (*arche*) - a ruler must have someone or something over which to exercise dominion (Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10; Rom. 8:38).

2) authorities (*exousia*) - again, authority, by definition, demands a subordinate (Eph. 1:21; 3:10; Col. 1:16).

3) powers (*dunamis*) - Eph. 1:21; Rom. 8:38. In Mark 9:29 Jesus refers to a type of demon that "cannot come out but by prayer and fasting." The point seems to be that some demons are stronger and more powerful than others. Hence, there is implied a hierarchy or differentiation based on spiritual strength.

- 4) dominions (*kuriotetos*) - again, "lordship" or "dominion" over what, whom, and where (Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16)?
- 5) thrones (*thronoi*) - used of angels only in Col. 1:16.
- 6) world rulers (*kosmokratoras*) - used only in Eph. 6:12.

If all angels and demons are of the same type or rank or carry the same authority, why are they described by such a variety of terms? It would also seem that with difference in rank comes difference in power, task, etc.

7. *What is their ministry?*

- a. worship - Isa. 6; Rev. 4:6-11; 5:11 (unending praise)
- b. service - of God and on our behalf. Heb. 1:7 ("ministers" = *leitourgos* = priestly service); Heb 1:14; Ps. 103:19-21 (open-ended service, i.e., whatever God should desire or decree). Often people will question the claim that an angelic being is responsible for some event by saying: "Where is that in the Bible?", as if to say angels can only do what they are explicitly recorded as already having done during biblical times. But there is no basis for restricting angelic activity to what is explicitly recorded in Scripture. If, as Psalm 103 indicates, they exist to fulfill God's will and perform His commands, the scope and variety of their activity could be virtually limitless.
- c. guidance and direction - Gen. 24:7,40 (the servant of Abraham who pursued a bride for Isaac); Ex. 14:19 (an angel guided Israel in the wilderness); Ex. 23:20; Num. 20:16; Acts 5:17-20; 8:26; 10:3-7,22; 16:9(?).
- d. guard and protect - Pss. 34:7; 78:23-25; 91:11; 1 Kings 19:5-7; Dan. 6:20-23; 12:1; Acts 12:15 (was Luke only reporting their belief without himself endorsing it? No. Does one's guardian angel on occasion take on the physical characteristics of the one he guards?). A few texts deserve special note:
  - Considerable debate has surrounded the reference to the "angels" of the seven churches in Rev. 2-3.
    1. A few have argued that the "angel" is the "pastor" of the church. Against this view are several points. First, it is contrary to the NT portrait of church structure. Nowhere in the NT is a single individual portrayed as exercising pastoral authority over a congregation. Rule by a plurality of elders is the standard NT perspective. Second, this view is historically anachronistic, for the existence of a single pastor/bishop was unknown until Ignatius (@ 110 a.d.). Third, the word "angel" is used some 60x in Revelation and always means a supernatural or spiritual being. Fourth, the word "angel" is nowhere else in the NT used to designate an ecclesiastical office. Fifth, we know from Acts 20 that the Ephesian church was ruled by a plurality of elders.
    2. Some suggest that the "angel" refers to a prophet or delegated representative of the church, i.e., someone who undertook the responsibility of maintaining communication with those outside the congregation. This would be an ambassador or secretary of sorts who handled correspondence, etc. Stress is thus placed on the literal meaning of the Greek term *angelos* = messenger (cf. Luke 9:52; James 2:25).
    3. In 1:11 the letters are directed to "the churches" (plural). So also at the end of each letter we read: "Let him hear what the Spirit says to the *churches*." Thus the Lord speaks to the *whole church* and not just to an "angel". This leads some to conclude that the angel **is** the church, i.e., a **personification** of the church. The Greek text would allow

(but by no means require) this interpretation, being rendered, “to the angel *which is the church.*”

4. Another theory is that the “angel” of each church is its guardian angel. See Deut. 32:8 (LXX); Dan. 10:13; 12:1; Matt. 18:10; Heb. 1:14; Acts 12:15. This is certainly a more likely view than any of the preceding three.

5. Beasley-Murray contends that “the most plausible solution of the problem recognizes the Danielic background of angels assigned to nations, but sees them as akin to the Persian *fravashis*, i.e., heavenly counterparts of earthly individuals and communities. *The angels of the churches are then heavenly counterparts of the earthly congregations.* The idea is not to be literalized, as though John thought of congregations seated in heaven above, answering to their equivalents on earth below. We help ourselves if we think of them as existentially in heaven though living on earth. John writes to people who form very earthly communities, whose life is characterized by the failures and weakness to which any human organization is prone. But these communities have one feature which marks them off from all others on earth: they are *in Jesus* (v. 9), and so saints of the Most High, priests and kings with Christ to God, lights in the world through whom the Light of the world shines. It is because their determinative life is in Jesus that John writes to the ‘angels’ of the churches. Their earthly conduct is the reflection of their heavenly relationship” (69-70).

Beasley-Murray also points to the fact that in 1:20 the *seven stars* in Christ’s right hand are said to represent the seven angels of the churches. In the ancient world the seven (then known) planets were a common symbol for sovereignty (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the moon, and either Earth or the Sun). He says: “Even in John’s day there were many who believed that the planets were gods, exercising a powerful and even fearful influence over the lives of men. From this it was an easy transition to make of them a symbol of the political power exercised by the Roman Caesars over the world, and in this sense the seven stars often occur on imperial coins. When John declares that the seven stars are in Christ’s hand, he is claiming that the sovereignty over this world resides not in the Caesars of Rome but in the Lord of the Church. These seven stars he then defines as the angels of the churches. The purpose of John’s prophecy, from its first page to its last, is to assure the saints of God that they are kings and priests to God through the redemptive grace of Christ. The purport of the symbolism of *the seven stars = the angels of the churches* is therefore plain: it declares that the sovereignty of this world belongs not to those who proudly claim to be the saviours and lords of men and who seek to crush the Church of Jesus. It belongs to the Christ of God and his people” (69-70).

- 2 Kings 6:8-23 - Several implications: (1) angelic armies fight God's battles; (2) angelic armies influence earthly affairs; (3) our knowledge of angelic armies and their role counters fear; (4) some are occasionally gifted to see into the spirit realm.
- Matthew 18:10 - An ancient custom prevailed in eastern court settings according to which those who stood "before the king" or were allowed to "see his face" were officers who enjoyed the king's special favor and were privileged to enjoy the closest possible fellowship. The implication may be that *the highest ranking angels* are assigned and commissioned by God to watch over with loving care his "little ones". Thus Jesus is saying, "Don't despise my 'little ones,' for they are so highly regarded that God has appointed his most illustrious angels to keep watch over them." Their continual presence before God, beholding his face, may mean one of two things: a) it may be a way of saying that our condition and needs are ever before God: he is always and ever alert to our situation in life; or b) their constant presence before him is for the purpose of quickly responding to whatever tasks God may assign them in their ministry to us. [If these angels “continually” stand before the face of God in heaven, how can they serve as daily or continual “guardians” of people on earth?]

- e. comfort and encourage - Mt. 4:11; Lk. 22:43; Acts 27:22-24.
  - f. reveal and interpret - Observe the role of angels in the giving of the Mosaic Law (Gal. 3:19; Acts 7:38,52-53; Heb. 2:2). They also communicate and then interpret God's will (Dan. 9; Revelation).
  - g. assistance in response to prayer - Dan. 9:20-24; Dan. 10.
  - h. execution of judgment - Gen. 18-19; Ex. 12:23,29 (is "the destroyer" an angelic being?); 2 Samuel 24:15-17; 2 Kings 19:35; Ps. 78:49; Acts 12:23; Revelation. Note: in Gen. 19:12-13 the angels say that they will execute judgment on S & G, yet in 19:23-25 it is God who does so.
8. *What should be our response to angels?*
- a. respect and awe - Dan. 8:16-17; 10:1-18; Luke 1.
  - b. we are to learn from their example in worship - Rev. 4-5; etc.
  - c. we must not worship them - (1) they themselves worship only God; (2) Ex. 20:1-6; Col. 2:18 (this refers either to worship in which angels are the objects [although there is little if any evidence of angels being worshiped at this time in the first century] or worship in which the angels themselves participate); all of Hebrews (esp. 1:5-14); (3) the angels themselves forbid it (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9).

Other important texts:

- Luke 16:22
- 1 Cor. 6:2-3
- 1 Cor. 11:1-10
- 1 Timothy 5:21; 1 Cor. 4:9-13; Eph. 3:9-10

In what sense are the angels in 1 Timothy 5:21 "elect" or "chosen"? Is this a way of referring to all angels that did not fall with Satan in his rebellion? If so, were they elect before his fall? Or were they in some sense "chosen" only after the fall of those whom we now refer to as demons? Or are these angels a smaller "select" or special group, such as the cherubim and seraphim, who are assigned the unique responsibility of keeping watch over the conduct of church leaders or church affairs in particular (note the context in which they appear)? Some have linked these "elect" angels with those whom the Dead Sea Scrolls refer to as the "angels of the Presence" (1QSb 4.25; 1QH 6.13; see also Jubilees 1.27-2.2; 1 Enoch 9.1; 20:1-7; 40.1-10; Testament of Levi 3:4-8), a higher rank of spiritual beings who stand before the "face" or "presence" of God, functioning as a royal court or council.

- Heb. 12:22; 13:1

*A brief overview of the nature and role of angels in the book of Daniel.*

**3:28**

- angels obey God, being sent to fulfill his purposes
- this "angel" (pre-incarnate Son of God?) is unaffected by fire and has the power to protect humans from fire

**4:13**

- these are called "watchers" and "holy ones"

- they communicate revelation via dreams
- they are empowered and authorized to mediate God's purposes ("decree", "decision")
- God delegates some measure of authority to them over the human realm (cf. 17b)

**6:22**

- this "angel" (pre-incarnate Son of God?) is sent by God, fulfilling his will
- the angel has power to restrain violent impulses of the lions (power over animal realm)

**7:10**

- innumerable angels are portrayed as "attending"(?) God
- innumerable angels are portrayed as "standing before"(?) God

**8:10 (?)****8:13**

- mediators of revelation
- conversation between two angels "overheard" by Daniel

**8:16**

- Gabriel provides an interpretation of divine revelation
- Gabriel is subject to God

**8:17-18**

- an angelic appearance is frightening to Daniel
- the angel makes physical contact with Daniel's body

**9:21-22**

- an angel takes on the form or appearance of a man
- an angel communicates with and teaches Daniel

**10:5-9**

- an angel(?) takes on the appearance of a human
- the angel displays physical characteristics that symbolize spiritual truths (purity, royalty, holiness, power, etc.)
- the angel induces fear and physical phenomena in Daniel
- the angel is capable of selective appearance; i.e., only Daniel actually "sees" and "hears" the angel, whereas his companions are aware of the presence of something that terrifies them (cf. Acts 9:1-7).

**10:10-12**

- the angel makes physical contact with Daniel's body
- the angel is acting in obedience to a divine commission
- angels can be the means by which God answers human prayers

**10:13-14**

- angels, both good and bad (demons), are engaged in conflict with each other (what is the nature of this conflict? how do they harm each other? how do they resist each other? what constitutes a victory or loss in such conflict?)
- neither good nor bad angels are omnipotent
- fallen angels (demons) “apparently have the capacity to bring about hindrances and delays, even of the delivery of the answers to believers whose requests God is minded to answer. . . . While God can, of course, override the united resistance of all the forces of hell if he chooses to do so, he accords to demons certain limited powers of obstruction and rebellion somewhat like those he allows humans” (Archer, 124-25).

#### **10:15-17**

- the angel again makes physical contact with Daniel’s body (“lips”)
- the angelic presence is a humbling experience for Daniel (v. 17); he addresses the angel as “my lord” = “sir” and asks how he, as a mortal man, could be allowed to converse with such a majestic being.

#### **10:18-21**

- by physically touching a human being an angel can impart both physical and emotional strength
- both good and bad angels (demons) may be assigned (by God and Satan, respectively) a special authority or role with respect to entire nations

#### **11:1**

- even good angels grow “weary” and need strengthening
- even good angels grow “discouraged” and need encouragement
- not even the highest angel (Michael, the archangel) is self-sufficient or omnipotent

This overview does not include other statements concerning angels that may appear in the remainder of chapter 11 and chapter 12. E.g., **12:1** and **12:5-7**.