

ANGELS

Some Thoughts

“God shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. They shall bear you in their hands, that you do not hurt your foot against a stone” (Ps. 91)

1. Introduction

The Bible clearly states that God’s creation includes things which are both visible and invisible. It is central to Christian belief to affirm that the physical universe of force and matter exists within a context of, and subject to, the spiritual realms.

It is increasingly being recognised today that the universe, which God has created, contains non-material beings and that personal outside forces – spirits, which may be angels or demons - exert an influence upon people.

Over recent years angels have become the subject of widespread fascination in the secular world. Within our materialistic society, angels are referred to in articles, books and even pop songs. There are also many claimed encounters with angelic beings.

The Bible contains over 270 references to angels. Although their nature is not fully defined, scripture gives us clear guidance about their role and their place within the purposes of God.

2. What are Angels?

The Hebrew word for angel is *mal’ach*, (as in the name **Malachi** *my messenger*) and the Greek word is *angelos*. Both words mean messenger and describe one who is sent with a message or task. This word is used to describe both human and heavenly messengers. For example the word used to describe both Haggai (Hag 1.13) and John the Baptist (Mt 11.10) means angel, and in God’s message to the seven churches (Rev 2-3) the ‘angel’ to whom John was instructed to write the letter, was probably a church elder or overseer. Augustine says that the word angel is the name of the office rather than the nature.

Heavenly angels are created spiritual beings (Ps 148.2,5). They are a part of God’s creation, brought into being through Christ (Jn 1.3, Col 1.16). They were present when the earth was created (Job 38.4-7). They are not the spirits of

departed or glorified human beings as some mistakenly believe.

Angels are not divine and worship of them is explicitly forbidden (Col 2.18, Rev 19.10, 22.9). Indeed, God ordained that all of His angels will worship Jesus (Heb 1.6).

3. Characteristics of Angels

Angels are an order of creature which is higher than human nature (Ps 8.5) and they have a special beauty and brilliance (Mt 28.3, Acts 6.15).

At times angels have taken human form. The word that defines this is *angelophanies*. An example of this is found in Genesis 18.3. However, their essential nature is as ‘spirits’ (Heb 1.14).

Angels are not usually seen, unless God reveals their presence. Balaam could not see the angel until the Lord opened his eyes (Num 22.31) and Elisha’s servant could not see the host of angels until Elisha prayed for his eyes to be opened (2 Kgs 6.17). They appear as youthful or mature men (Mk 16.5). They are not ghosts.

God’s angels are called holy because they have never experienced sin (Mark 8:38). These are called the elect angels (1 Tim. 5:21)

Angels are constantly in the presence of God (Mt 18.10). They are not subject to death (Lk 20.36). They have supernatural power (Mt 28.2, Acts 5.19, 2 Pet 2.11, Dan 10.13) and supernatural intelligence (2 Sam 14.20, Mt 24.36).

Angels have not been created in the image of God, as human beings are, and through our redemption in Christ we, as human beings, will be exalted above angels (1 Cor. 6.3).

Angels can communicate in human speech “*and they are aware of our prayers*” (Mt 28.5).

Angels have free will and emotions (Lk 2.13, Jas 2.19, Rev 12.17) and have the quality of persons.

4. Titles and Ranks of Angels

Ranks and orders of angels, are suggested in Paul's letter to the Ephesians (Eph 3.10, 6.12) and in 1 Peter 3.22. It seems the ranks reflect their area of authority.

The Angel of the LORD. A careful study of the passages mentioning the Angel of the LORD, indicates that this is no ordinary angel, but a *Christophany*, i.e. a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. This is proven by the way this Angel is identified as God, speaks as God, and claims the rights of God, and in some passages He distinguishes Himself from *Yahweh*, God the Father (Gen 16.7-14, 21.17-18, 22.11-18, 31.11-13, Ex 3.2, Jdg 2.1-4, 5.23, 6.11-22, 13.3-22, 2 Sam 24.16, Zech 1.12, 3.1, 12.8).

Michael is the only named archangel. He is the protector of Israel. He is called "*Michael your prince*" (Dan. 10:21). His name means "*who is like God*". He disputed with Satan about the body of Moses, but he refrained from judgment, leaving that to God (Jude 9). Jehovah's Witnesses identify Michael as Christ; but this is refuted by Hebrew 1.1-5.

Ephesians 6.12 refers to fallen angelic powers and their ranks which apparently counter the holy angels who have authority over nations. Daniel 10.13 refers to the "*prince of the kingdom of Persia*" opposing Michael. This was not the king of Persia but rather a fallen angel under Satan's control who had Persia as his special area of activity.

Gabriel is mentioned four times in the Scriptures and his name means "man of God" or "God is strong." He has a special role in the programme of God's Kingdom, being the one to reveal and interpret God's plans and purposes (Dan 9.21-27, Lk 1.26-27, Dan 8.15-16, Lk 1.11-20).

Lucifer means "shining one" or "star of the morning" (Is 14.12). He may have been the wisest and most beautiful of all God's created beings who was originally placed in a position of authority over the cherubim surrounding the throne of God, but he was expelled from heaven for challenging God's sovereignty and is more commonly known as Satan or the devil. True to his original name of Lucifer, Satan is referred to by Jesus as an angel of light.

Cherubim have great power and beauty and their duty is to protect and proclaim God's glory and holy presence (Gen 3.24, Ezek 1). They were represented by golden figures covering the mercy seat above the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies (Ex 25.17-22).

Seraphim means "burning ones". They surround the throne of God, declaring and protecting his holiness (Is 6.2-3.)

Rulers, Principalities, Authorities, Thrones, Dominions and Powers. These words are used in Scripture to refer to both good and evil angels who are involved in ruling the universe and in the events of history (Rom 8.38, Eph 1.21, 3.10, 6.12, Col 1.16, 2.10,15, 1Pet 3.22, 2Pet 2.10-11, Jud 8).

Angels of Judgment. Certain angels are associated with judgments that will be poured out on the earth (Rev 8-9, Rev 14.18, 20.1-2).

Angels of the Churches. It is most probable that God has allocated certain angels to watch over and guard his Church. However the references in Rev 1.16, 20 and Rev 2 & 3, could refer to human pastors or leaders, because the word angel, means "messenger" and it is not clear whether these references are to heavenly or human agents.

Guardian Angels. After warning of the serious consequences of offending one of His little ones, Jesus said "*I say to you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is heaven*" (Mt 18.1-11). The Lord uses them to come to the aid of His elect (Heb 1.1-14). He "*will command his angels...to guard you in all your ways*" (Ps 91.11).

5. What do Angels do?

Angels serve and worship God. Angels stand in the presence of God (Mt 18.10); they wait on him (Ps 103.20, Is 6.1-4, 6-7, Job 1.6, 2.1, Rev 5.11, 8.1); they worship him "*Let all God's angels worship Him*" (Heb. 1.6, Is 6.3, Ps 148.2, Rev 5.12); they delight in what he does (Job 38.6-7, Lk 2.12-14, 15.10).

Angels protect, direct and guard. In Exodus 23.20-22 we read, "*Behold I send an angel before you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place which I have prepared*". From childhood to the end of life we are surrounded by the care and intercession of angels (Mt 18.10, Lk 16.22, Ps 34.7 & 91.10-13, Job 33.23-24, Zech 1.12).

Angels are messengers - they inform, warn and guide. They **predicted** his coming (Mt 1.20, Lk 1.26-28), **announced** his birth (Lk 2.8-15); **warned** Joseph to take Jesus and flee into Egypt (Mt 2.13-15), and **directed** the family to return to Israel after Herod died (Mt 2.19-21).

Angels minister to Christian believers. The writer to the Hebrews describes angels as "*ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation*" (Heb 1.14). They bring answers to prayer (Dan 10.12, Acts 12.5-10), they help in bringing people to the Saviour (Acts 8.26, 10.3), they may encourage in times of danger (Acts 27.23-24) and they care for God's people at the time of death (Luke 16.22).

Angels are agents of God's judgment. They battle with Satan (Rev 12.7), and carry out God's judgements (Gen 19.13, Dan 10.13-21, 12.1-4, Acts 12.23, Rev 7.1, 8.2, Rev 14.6-7, Rev 16.1), and they will separate the righteous from the unrighteous (Mt 13.39-41).

6. Angels in the Old Testament

The Old Testament records the visitation of angels as messengers to the prophets and others chosen by God for a specific purpose. It also refers to angels seen in dreams and visions.

The Old Testament refers to the ranks and activities of angels and shows that It is God who directly instructs His angels to act.

- Abraham received a visitation of three men, one of whom is referred to as the LORD (Gen. 18.22), whilst the other two are referred to as angels (Gen. 19.1).
- Jacob encountered angels on his journey (Gen. 32.1-2) and, in a dream, he saw a vision of angels going up and down a ladder joining earth to heaven (Gen. 28.12).
- Moses received the Law of God on Mount Sinai through angels (Acts 7.53, Gal 3.19).
- Isaiah saw Angels worship God. The seraphim referred to in Isaiah 6 constantly call out "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.*" (Is 6.3)
- Ezekiel received his revelations in visions or by means of an angel (Ezek 40.3).
- Daniel in the lion's den testified - "*My God sent his angel and he shut the mouths of the lions.*" (Dan 6.22).

7. Angels in the New Testament

The New Testament warns about regarding angels too highly and in Galatians 1.8 we read that the truth of the Gospel is more important even than messages from angels. It is emphasised that Jesus Christ is superior to all the angels and is indeed worshipped by them - "*He became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.*" (Heb1.4).

The Jewish sect called the Sadducees did not believe in angels (Acts 23.8) but the Gospels record that there are countless hosts of angels (Matt 26.53).

- The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah to announce Elizabeth's pregnancy (Lk 1.11-12,19).
- An angel appeared to reassure Joseph in a dream (Mt 1.20).
- Angels shared God's joy (Lk 15.7).
- Angels accompanied the Son of Man (Mt 16.27).
- Angels are guardians of children and believers (Mt 18.10 and Acts 12.15).

- Angels marked the first stages of the Church and they take part in the progress of the Gospel. (Acts 12.7, Acts 27.23, Rev 1.1).
- Angel hosts are seen as numbering "*thousands upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand*" (Rev 5.11, Heb 12.12).
- Angels released the Apostles from jail (Acts 5.17-21 & 12.7 -15).
- Angels will accompany Christ's return (2 Thes 1.17).

8. Jesus and Angels

Angels play a prominent part in the recorded events in the life of Jesus.

- Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her she would give birth to Jesus (Lk 1.26-31).
- An angel announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds following which a host of angels appeared (Lk 2.9-14).
- An angel protected Jesus as a child (Mt 2.13).
- Angels served Him during his temptation in the wilderness (Mt 4.11).
- Angels strengthened Him in his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane before the cross (Lk 22.43).
- At his resurrection an angel rolled away the stone from the tomb (Mt 28.2).
- Angels announced His resurrection to the women (Mt 28.5-6; Lk 24.5-7).
- Angels were present and interpreted his ascension (Acts 1.11).
- Angels will accompany his return, "*When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory*" (Mt 25.31-32).

Jesus spelt out clearly that angels are under his direction and that He could have called for more than twelve legions (a legion in the Roman army numbered 6,000) of angels to help him on the night of his arrest and trial (Matt. 26:53). He will also direct them to exercise judgment, "*The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will weed out of His Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil*" (Mt 13.41-43).

9. Spiritual Warfare

The reality of spiritual warfare is confirmed in Biblical teaching.

Jesus spoke of personalised evil and used the name Satan to describe this power (Lk 10.17). The Hebrew word satan means adversary - for example King Hadad of Damascus is called the satan of Solomon (1Kg11.4). The character of Satan is described by his names and activity. The Bible calls him the enemy, the god of this world, the accuser, slanderer, liar and father of lies, an angel of light, the god of filth, the evil one, the tormentor, the strong one, the dragon, the serpent, the tempter and the destroyer. He is described as the force behind lying, murder, temptation, the opposition of

God's people, some diseases, corrupting minds and consciences, violence, bitter hatred, moral breakdown, oppressing people, and holding people captive in habits and wrong attitudes.

The Bible describes how Satan 'fell' to become the evil one: *"How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit."* (Is. 14.12-15).

Satan wanted to be equal with God and have the glory that belongs to God alone. His statement "**I will**", repeated five times, can be contrasted with Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed *"not my will but yours be done"* and Jesus teaches His followers to pray to God *"your kingdom come, your will be done"* (Matt. 6.10).

It is of note that the motto of witchcraft is *"do what you will"*. Under the leadership of Satan a section of the angelic host rebelled against God. The large number of angels who took sides with Satan are called demons and are Satan's angels in the world endeavouring to accomplish his will. They, like Satan, are fiercely antagonistic to God's purposes. Although Satan and his demons have spiritual power, they have been totally defeated by Christ's sacrifice on the Cross (Col. 2.15) and John declares, *"...the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."* (1Jn 4.4). Satan is **not** all knowing, all present, nor all powerful. He is not equal to God nor does he have comparable power to God. He is a created being who has become corrupt.

We are warned to be on our guard, *"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."* (1Pet 5.8). We are told that we must discern between good and evil spirits - between angels and demons, *"...do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God..."* (1Jn 4.1). Discernment is a gift from God and one for which we ought to ask, this is especially important when we recognise that demons can masquerade as angels of God, as is seen in spiritism and other form of occult practice.

Aggressive demonic forces, orchestrated by the evil one, are constantly at work but God has committed His angels to wage war and Paul proclaims that evil has been defeated, *"And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he [Jesus] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross"* (Col 2.15). Similarly, in his letter to the Romans

Paul testifies, *"...we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom 8.37-39).

Jesus gives His disciples authority over all the powers of Satan and his demons, *"I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you."* But He also goes on to warn, *"However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."* (Lk 10.19-20).

As well as knowing that we have the authority of Jesus, we can be confident, as Elisha, who affirmed, *"Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."* (2Kg 6.17). If we were more aware of angelic protection we would be less afraid of spiritual attack.

10. Conclusion

The existence of angels is woven into the fabric of the Bible and the belief and experience of the Church in all the centuries. The term angel is mentioned over 100 times in the Old Testament and more than 170 in the New Testament.

Angels are spiritual beings which worship God and are perfectly obedient to Him. They have the task of defending God's people and being His messengers. They exist in vast numbers and their activity alerts us to the spiritual reality of the unseen powers and influences in our world today.

Angels lead to God, point to God, serve God, adore God. Their presence is mysterious but powerful. As Christians we believe we are surrounded by them. They care for us, they watch over us, they respond to our prayers. We may be aware or unaware of their presence, but Biblically their existence is real. Angels are not to become a focus or obsession and they most certainly must not be worshipped.

Christians are seated with Christ at the right-hand of God. We have a status that is higher than angels because of our union in Christ (Eph 1.20-22, 2.4-6, Heb 2.9). Angels are servants of God (Jn 15.15) and they are sent by God to *"serve those who will inherit salvation"* (Heb 1.14).

"Thank God for His angels, and thank Him also for His love for you. Thank Him most of all for the salvation He has provided for us through His Son, Jesus Christ". Billy Graham