
Angels, God's Ministering Spirits

by

J. Hampton Keathley III

Introduction

Theologians have often viewed angels as a very difficult subject.¹ Why? Because, while there is abundant mention of angels in the Bible, the nature of this revelation is without the same kind of explicit description we often find with other subjects developed in Scripture:

Every reference to angels is incidental to some other topic. They are not treated in themselves. God's revelation never aims at informing us regarding the nature of angels. When they are mentioned, it is always in order to inform us further about God, what he does, and how he does it. Since details about angels are not significant for that purpose, they tend to be omitted.²

Though theologians have been cautious in their study of angels we have been bombarded in recent years by what could easily be called *Angelmania*. In fact, this is the title of an article by Dr. Kenneth Gangel in "Kindred Spirit" on the widespread discussion and fascination with angels in our time by the secular world.³ Gangel writes,

In his 1990 book, *Angels: An Endangered Species*, Malcolm Godwin estimates that over the last 30 years one in every ten pop songs mentions an angel. But that was just romantic fun.

¹ The following is a short study on angels in view of the present day fascination with angels. It will be followed by an in depth study on the doctrine of angelology, the study of angels as it is developed in the Bible.

² Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1983, p. 434.

³ "Kindred Spirit," a magazine published quarterly by Dallas Theological Seminary, Summer 1995, pp. 5-7.

Now our culture takes angels seriously, if not accurately. In the last few years *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Redbook*, and a host of other popular magazines have carried articles about angels. In mid-1994, ABC aired a two-hour, prime time special titled "Angels: the Mysterious Messengers." In *Newsweek's* November 28, 1994 issue an article titled "In Search of the Sacred" observed that "20% of Americans have had a revelation from God in the last year, and 13% have seen or sensed the presence of an angel" (p. 54).

Newsweek is right; modern society, so seemingly secular and hopelessly materialistic, desperately searches for some spiritual and supernatural meaning. If angels can provide it, then angels it will be.⁴

The bookstores abound with books on this subject. These books not only claim encounters with angels, but instruct people on how to contact them. We now have a weekly program on one of the major networks entitled "Touched By An Angel." Certainly, one might argue, this is just a story for entertainment. However, this show not only demonstrates our fascination with this topic, but a illustrates a very poor grasp of what the Bible really teaches about angels and about God along with some very definite distortions of Scripture. By these comments I do not mean to discount all the so-called encounters with angels that we occasionally read or hear about. Why? Because, as will be discussed in more detail later, angels are servants of God and described by the author of Hebrews as, "ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?" See also Psalm 91:11 and Matthew 4:11. So certainly, for those who believe

⁴ Gangel, p. 5.

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the record of Scripture, we can trust completely in the Bible's teaching on angels and, "with a perhaps lesser degree of certainty, consider the personal accounts of reputable Christians."⁵

A good illustration of the latter can be found in an article by Sue Bohlin entitled, "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly." She writes:

I was about thirteen years old when I had my first encounter with an angel. I was going upstairs to my room, pulling my entire weight on the handrail, when it suddenly came off in my hand. I fell backwards, head first. Halfway into a terrible fall, I felt a strong hand on my back push me upright. There was nobody there – well, nobody *visible!*

Angel stories are always fascinating, and in this essay I address angels: the good, the bad, and the ugly. The good angels are the holy ones, the bad angels are the evil ones, which the Bible calls demons, and the ugly angels are demons disguising themselves as good angels. These ugly angels have deceived many people in a culture that has embraced "angel mania."⁶

While many details about angels are omitted in the Bible, it is important to keep in mind three important elements about the biblical revelation God has given us.

- (1) The mention of angels is inclusive in Scripture. Depending on the Bible translation searched, these celestial beings are referred to from 294 to 305 times in the Bible. References to angels occur at least 116 times in the Old Testament and 175 times in the New Testament.
- (2) These many references are found in at least 34 books from the very earliest books (whether Job or Genesis) to the last book of the Bible (Revelation).
- (3) Finally, there are numerous references to angels by the Lord Jesus, whom Scripture declares to be the creator of all things, which includes angelic beings. Paul wrote, "For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities (a reference to angels) – all things have been created by Him and for Him" (Col. 1:16).

⁵ Gangel, p. 7.

⁶ Sue Bohlin, "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly," Probe Ministries (<http://www.probe.org/>). Probe is an excellent Christian resource and I highly recommend it.

It is out of the this extended body of Scripture that the study presented here will be developed. The Bible will be the authority for this study and not the speculations of men nor their experiences nor what people think sounds logical.

A Simple Definition

Angels are spiritual beings created by God to serve Him, though created higher than man. Some, the good angels, have remained obedient to Him and carry out His will, while others, fallen angels, disobeyed, fell from their holy position, and now stand in active opposition to the work and plan of God.

The Nature of Angels

Angels are created beings

The fact of their creation is brought out in Psalm 148. There the psalmist calls upon all in the celestial heavens, including the angels, to praise God. The reason given is, "For He commanded and they were created" (Ps. 148:1-5).

The time of their creation is never stated, however, we know they were created before the creation of the world. From the book of Job we are told that they were present when the earth was created (Job 38:4-7) so their creation was prior to the creation of the earth as described in Genesis one.

The agent of their creation is specifically stated to be Christ as the One who created all things (cf. John 1:1-3 with Col. 1:16).⁷

The nature of their creation is as a host or a company, simultaneously. Unlike human beings and the animal kingdom created in pairs and who procreate, angels were created simultaneously as a company, a countless host of myriads (Col. 1:16; Neh 9:6). This is suggested by the fact they are not

⁷ The Son's Creation includes "all" things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. These indicate the *entire* universe, both material and immaterial. A highly organized hierarchy of angelic beings is referred to with the word "thrones" (*qronoi*), "powers" (*kuriotites*), "rulers" (*arcai*), and "authorities" (*exousiai*). This not only indicates a highly organized dominion in the spirit world of angels, but shows that Paul was writing to refute an incipient form of Gnosticism that promoted the worship of angels in place of the worship of Christ (cf. Col. 2:18). In this, Paul demonstrates superiority and rightful place of worship as supreme (cf. Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Phil. 2:9-10; Col. 2:10, 15).

subject to death and they do not or were not to propagate. They are nevertheless an innumerable host created before the creation of the earth (cf. Job. 38:7; Neh. 9:6; Ps 148:2, 5; Heb 12:22; Dan 7:10; Matt 26:53; Rev. 5:11; with Matt. 22:28-30; Luke 20:20-36).

Angels are spirit creatures

(1) Angels are *spirit beings*. Though at times they have been given the ability to reveal themselves in the form of human bodies as in Genesis 18:3, they are described as “spirits” in Hebrews 1:14. This suggests they do not have material bodies as we do. Hence, they do not function as human beings in terms of marriage and procreation (Mark 12:25) nor are they subject to death (Luke 20:36).

Mankind, including our incarnate Lord, is “lower than the angels” (Heb. 2:7). Angels are not subject to the limitations of man, especially since they are incapable of death (Luke 20:36). Angels have greater wisdom than man (2 Sam. 14:20), yet it is limited (Matt. 24:36). Angels have greater power than man (Matt. 28:2; Acts 5:19; 2 Pet. 2:11), yet they are limited in power (Dan. 10:13).

Angels, however, have limitations compared to man, particularly in future relationships. Angels are not created in the image of God, therefore, they do not share man’s glorious destiny of redemption in Christ. At the consummation of the age, redeemed man will be exalted above angels (1 Cor. 6:3).⁸

This also means they are not omnipresent. They cannot be everywhere at once.

(2) All angels were created *holy*, without sin, and in a state of perfect holiness.

Originally all angelic creatures were created holy. God pronounced His creation good (Gen. 1:31), and, of course, He could not create sin. Even after sin entered the world, God’s good angels, who did not rebel against Him, are called holy (Mark 8:38). These are the elect angels (1 Tim. 5:21) in contrast to the evil angels who followed Satan in his rebellion against God (Matt. 25:41).⁹

(3) As created beings, they are *mere creatures*. They are not divine and are not to be worshipped (see Rev. 19:10; 22:9). As a separate order of creatures, they are both distinct from human beings and higher than humans with powers far beyond our abilities in this present age (1 Cor. 6:3; Heb. 1:14; 2:7). But as creatures they are limited in their powers, knowledge, and activities (1 Peter 1:11-12; Rev. 7:1). Like all of creation, angels are under God’s authority and subject to His judgment (1 Cor. 6:3; Matt. 25:41).

The Types of Angels (Good and Evil)

While all the angels were originally created holy and without sin, there was a rebellion by Satan, who, being lifted up by his own beauty, sought to exalt himself above God and rebelled. In his rebellion, he took with him one-third of the angels (Rev. 12:4). This rebellion and fall is probably described for us in Isaiah 14:12-14 and Ezekiel 28:15 embodied in the kings of Babylon and Tyre.¹⁰ Prophesying of a future angelic conflict that will occur in the middle of the Tribulation, John wrote, “And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war” (Rev. 12:7). In other words, there are good angels and there are evil angels.

As is clear from Revelation 12:7 and many other passages, the leader of these fallen angels (or demons as they are also called) is Satan (cf. Matt. 12:25-27). Satan, the leader of unholy angels, is a liar, a murderer, and a thief (John 10:10). As God’s great antagonist, He hates God and God’s people. Scripture teaches us that he prowls about like a roaring lion in search of those whom he may devour by his nefarious schemes (1 Peter 5:8). As an angelic being, Satan, along with his demon-like angels who operate under his authority, is supernaturally powerful and brilliant, and he uses all his powers against humanity. Not only is he a liar, a thief, and a distorer, but that which characterizes him above all else is deception. John describes him as the one “who deceives the whole

⁸ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1996, electronic media.

⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1987, electronic media.

¹⁰ The terms and descriptions given there certainly go far beyond that of any human monarch. Further, other passages clearly teach us that there are often angelic or demonic forces behind the reign of human kings or kingdoms (cf. Dan. 10; and Eph. 6:10-12).

world" (John 12:9). In his cunning, he disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). So, in view of this, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness . . ." (2 Cor. 11:15). More will be said on this below.

The Ministry of Good Angels

The good and loyal angels are the mighty servants of God who constantly serve him always doing His will. The Psalmist described them as, "Bless the LORD, you His angels, Mighty in strength, who perform His word, Obeying the voice of His word! Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, You who serve Him, doing His will" (Ps. 103:20-21). It is no wonder, then, that the author of Hebrews, in showing the superiority of Christ to even the mighty angels, asked (the question here demands a positive answer both in the Greek text and contextually), "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?" (Heb. 1:14). The answer is "Yes!" Though God can always act independently without the use of agents, He has chosen to use both angelic and human instruments to accomplish His will. In keeping with this, over and over again in the Bible, we find angels acting as God's servants involved in variegated ministry to people.

Angels Protect

Perhaps no aspect of their ministry to man is more talked about than the idea of a "guardian angel." Over the years, I have often been asked, "Does everyone have a guardian angel?" While no passage specifically states that every person has a guardian angel, the Bible does teach that angels do guard or protect as Psalm 91:11 declares. In addition, Matthew 18:10 may suggest a guardian angel because of the statement Christ made regarding little children when He said, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you, that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven." But it should also be pointed out that Psalm 91:11 is directed to those who make the Lord their refuge.

The psalmist explained that **no harm or disaster can befall** those who have made **the LORD their refuge** (mah£seh, "shelter from danger"; . . .) because He has commissioned

angels to care for them. angels protect from physical harm and give believers strength to overcome difficulties, pictured here as wild lions and dangerous snakes. Satan, in tempting Christ, quoted 91:11-12 (Matt. 4:6), which shows that even God's most marvelous promises can be foolishly applied.¹¹

Some would claim that this Old Testament passage should not be applied in modern times, but the author of Hebrews does not seem to draw that distinction. That they are ministering spirits who minister to the saints is presented as a general truth of the Bible and should not be restricted to Bible times. Also, Scripture suggests that Michael, the archangel, is particularly involved in ministry to Israel. Concerning the reference to Michael in Daniel 10:13, Ryrie writes:

Michael, which means "who is like God?" (v. 21; 12:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7), is the special guardian of the affairs of Israel (12:1) and is designated the archangel (Jude 9). One of the chief princes shows a hierarchy among the angels (cf. Eph. 1:21). *I had been left there with the kings of Persia.* The good angel (cf. vv. 5-6), with Michael's help, was left in a place of preeminence in influencing Persia. But the battle between good and evil angels over the control of nations continues (see v. 20 and Rev. 20:3).

Regarding accounts of angelic protection, Dr. Kenneth Gangel gives the following account which is similar to others I have heard about, especially with missionaries:

A veteran missionary friend of mine (now retired) tells the story about a woman missionary alone on a compound in northern Africa during a riot by one of the local tribes. She hid in a closet and prayed as warriors advanced along the dusty road toward the houses where the white intruders lived. Amazingly, she never heard them. No one ever entered her building, and there was no evidence of any turmoil. My friend learned later that the warriors, who intended to kill everyone at the missionary compound and burn it to the ground, instead retreated when they found the compound guarded by tall

¹¹ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, OT, John F. Walvoord Roy B. Zuck, Editors, Victor Books, 1983, 1985, electronic media.

warriors dressed in white and carrying large swords. Angels?

Another and similar account was also reported by a medical missionary at his home church in Michigan:

While serving at a small field hospital in Africa, I traveled every two weeks by bicycle through the jungle to a nearby city for supplies. This required camping overnight half way. On one of these trips, I saw two men fighting in the city. One was seriously injured, so I treated him and witnessed to him of the Lord Jesus Christ. I then returned home without incident.

Upon arriving in the city several weeks later, I was approached by the man I had treated earlier. He told me he had known that I carried money and medicine. He said, "some friends and I followed you into the jungle knowing you would camp overnight. We waited for you to go to sleep and planned to kill you and take your money and drugs. Just as we were about to move into your campsite, we saw that you were surrounded by 26 armed guards."

I laughed at this and said I was certainly all alone out in that jungle campsite. The young man pressed the point, "No, sir, I was not the only one to see the guards. My Jave friends also saw them and we all counted them. It was because of those guards that we were afraid and left you alone."

At this point in the church presentation in Michigan, one of the men in the church jumped up and interrupted the missionary, and asked, "Can you tell me the exact date when this happened?" The missionary thought for a while and recalled the date.

The man in the congregation told this side of the story: "On that night in Africa it was morning here. I was preparing to play golf. As I put my bag in the car, I felt the Lord leading me to pray for you. In fact, the urging was so strong that I called the men of this church together to pray for you. Will all of those men who met with me that day please stand?"

The men who had met that day to pray together stood — there were 26 of them!

Again we ask, were these angels? While I cannot verify this story, I have no doubt whatsoever that it could be true.

Angels Provide

As angels were sent by God to provide sustenance for the Lord at the end of his forty days in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11), so he has undoubtedly on occasion done so for believers in our day. Some would include the provision of bread and water for Elijah (1 Kings 19:5-6), but this was a ministry of "the Angel of the Lord" which could simply mean, angel sent from the Lord, but it's probably best to understand this as a reference a theophany, a manifestation of God to Elijah.¹²

As an illustration of possible angelic provision, Sue Bohlin gives the following account:

In 1944, the penniless wife of a pastor and evangelist in Switzerland, Susie Ware prayed, "God, I need five pounds of potatoes, two pounds of pastry flour, apples, pears, a cauliflower, carrots, veal cutlets for Saturday, and beef for Sunday." A few hours later, someone knocked on the door, and there was a young man carrying a basket, who said, "Mrs. Ware, I am bringing what you asked for." It was precisely what she'd prayed for — down to the exact brand of pastry flour she wanted. The young man slipped away, and even though Rev. and Mrs. Ware watched at the window to their building, the man never exited. He just disappeared (Anderson, Joan Wester. *Where Angels Walk*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1992, pp. 60-62).¹³

My wife's sister, Connie Griffith, had an experience about 15 years ago which is recorded in Jodie Berndt's book, *Celebration of Miracles*.¹⁴ Connie, and her husband Geoff, were missionaries in Africa working with Hindu people and had an opportunity to visit missionaries in India. The trip involved a 38-hour train ride from New Delhi to

¹² Regarding the mention of "the angel of the LORD" in Genesis 16:9, Ryrie writes: "A theophany, a self-manifestation of God. He here speaks as God, identifies Himself with God, and claims to exercise the prerogatives of God. See 16:7-14; 21:17-21; 22:11-18; 31:11, 13; Ex. 3:2; Judg. 2:1-4; 5:23; 6:11-24; 13:3-22; 2 Sam. 24:16; Zech. 1:12; 3:1; 12:8. Because the angel of the Lord ceases to appear after the incarnation, it is often inferred that the angel in the OT is a preincarnate appearance of the second person of the Trinity" (Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, 1986, 1995, Moody, p. 27).

¹³ Bohlin.

¹⁴ Jodie Berndt, *Celebration of Miracles*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 1995, p. 105-112.

an orphanage in the south. They had been warned not to eat the food on the train, but they had taken very little food with them and Connie was so famished she decided to take her chances. She ate some curried mutton, and was soon extremely ill.

After arriving at the orphanage, Connie went to bed where she remained for three days. Geoff was traveling during that time and the missionaries thinking she was reacting to the miserable poverty of their surroundings thought she didn't want to be bothered and left her alone. It was not until it was time to move on to the next orphanage that they realized she was desperately ill. They realized she needed to get to a hospital fast so they set out for the nearest one which was three hours away. About fifteen minutes into the ride Connie's muscles began to cramp. First her fingers then her knees and toes curled inward and her facial muscles contracted so she was unable to speak. Finally she found herself paralyzed as the jeep bounced along the primitive road.

They were concerned, thinking she might not make it because she was so dehydrated. Geoff cried out to God, "please do a miracle! Do *something!*" Suddenly the missionary who was driving spotted a small Red Cross building just off the trail. As the jeep pulled to a stop, Connie tried to protest. She was concerned about the rampant AIDS epidemic in these remote areas and the practice of reusing needles. As the group made their way into the building which was well lit and very clean, an Indian man, dressed in white shirt and baggy pants, greeted them in perfect English. He said, "I know what's wrong with her. She's dehydrated. I have some electrolytes here in this packet. This water has already been boiled." He mixed the electrolytes with the water and handed Geoff an eye dropper encased in a plastic bag. "It's sterile," he said, looking right at Connie.

Geoff was given instructions to put one drop at a time in Connie's mouth (which had locked open) until they reached the hospital. When they reached the hospital an hour-and-a-half later, her muscles had relaxed and she was able to walk into the hospital. The doctor said it was the worst case of dehydration he'd ever seen. Her body had literally sucked the water out of the cells and she'd come within hours of dying.

A few weeks later, after returning to Africa, they received a letter from the missionary couple in India. They said, "You won't believe this, but when we returned to our village via the route we

had taken to get you to the hospital, that Red Cross building was gone. There was nothing there in the place where it was." Was this the work of one of God's ministering spirits? One day we will know, but in the meantime, we can certainly give praise to the Lord.

Angels Proclaim God's Truth

Throughout the Bible we find angels involved in communicating God's truth or message as the Spirit of God directed them. This is, of course, is very much in keeping with the basic meaning of the word angel. Both the Hebrew word for angel (*mal'ak*), and the Greek word (*aggelos*, pronounced *angelos*) mean "messenger." In a number of passages we are told that angels were instruments God used to reveal His Word (cf. Acts 7:38, 53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2). But that is only half the story. Numbers of times they appeared to announce an important message. They announced the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 1:11f, 26f; Matt. 1:20f). In the Tribulation, God will use them to announce key events (cf. Rev. 14:6). Today, however, God's canon of Scripture, the Bible, is complete. Beware, therefore, of anyone claiming to have new revelation as given by an angel or of anyone claiming to be an angel with new revelation. Remember, Satan is a deceiver with his own angels of deceit promoting false doctrine (2 Cor. 11:1-4, 12-13; 1 Tim. 4:1).

Angels Punish or Carry Out God's Judgments

With their enormous God-given power, they can carry out anything God sends them to do. It is no wonder then that we find them as vital agents in pouring out the awful judgments of the Tribulation as described in Revelation and even in doing battle with Satan and his evil angels to restrict them from any access to heaven, confining them to the realm of this earth and its immediate atmosphere in the middle of the Tribulation (Rev. 12:7f). This will be done in anticipation of Satan's bondage and final defeat as described in Revelation 12 and 20.

But such is not the picture we find in our modern day fascination with angels. As Gangel writes, "I doubt that many figurines of punishing angels found their way into gift boxes last Christmas, but

the Bible doesn't hesitate to describe this part of their activity."¹⁵

Final Thoughts on the Ministry of Angels

Surely it is comforting to know that God may protect, provide, and encourage us in supernatural ways, but this does not always guarantee such deliverance and certainly we should never presume on this provision of God. So having considered the various ways angels minister, we should keep in mind that God does not always deliver us from danger or supply our needs in such miraculous ways whether by angels or by His direct intervention. For His own sovereign purposes in His plan for using suffering (a tool of growth, to manifest the character of Christ, to witness to others, etc.), the opposite is sometimes His will, as life clearly illustrates and Scripture declares (see Heb. 11:36-40).

The Deception of Evil, Fallen Angels

Just as people usually do not think of the punitive ministry of angels, so here is another area that is completely ignored by the popular ideas of angels, but that it is ignored is not without reason. The reason lies in Satan's deception and in the vacuum of man's heart as he seeks answers apart from God and His revelation of Himself and His plan of salvation as it is revealed in the Bible. As the arch deceiver and antagonist to God, the church, and mankind as whole, Satan is the master of disguise. It is clearly his masquerade as an angel of light with his servant angels, who also disguise themselves in one way or another, that are behind the current *Angelmania* in our society today. As Bohlin points out:

... there are many books, publications, and seminars that are filled with demonic deception of the ugliest kind. Because when you start talking to angels, you end up dealing with demons.¹⁶

Sue Bohlin has an excellent discussion of what to look for to discern the activity of these demonic, evil angels. She writes:

You know you're around "ugly angels," or demons masquerading as angels of light and holiness, when you see or hear these terms:

1. Contacting or communing with angels.

There are now books available with titles like *Ask Your Angels* (Daniel, Alma, Timothy Wyllie, and Andrew Ramer, *Ask your Angels*, New York: Ballantine, 1992) and *100 Ways to Attract Angels* (Sharp, Sally, *100 Ways to Attract Angels*, Minnesota: Trust Publications, 1994). But the Bible gives neither permission nor precedent for contacting angels. When people start calling on angels, it's not the holy angels who answer. They're demons, disguising themselves as good angels to people who don't know how to tell the difference.

2. Loving our angels, praying to our angels.

Some self-styled "angel experts" instruct their followers to love their angels and call upon them for health, healing, prosperity, and guidance. But angels are God's servants, and all this attention and emphasis and glory should go to God, not His servants. God says, "I will not share my glory with another" (Isaiah 42:8). Scripture makes no mention of loving angels — only God, His word, and people. And it never tells us to pray to angels, only to the Lord Himself.

3. Instruction, knowledge, or insight from angels, particularly ones with names.

Some angel teachers are proclaiming that angels are trying very hard to contact us, so they can give us deeper knowledge of the spiritual (Karyn Martin-Kuri, in an interview with *Body, Mind and Spirit* Journal, May/June 1993. Also, Albright, Naomi, *Angel Walk*, Tuscaloosa, Alabama: Portals Press, 1990). Invariably, this "angel knowledge" is a mixture of truth and lies, and never stands up to the absolute truth of Scripture.

There are four angel names that keep popping up in the angel literature: Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Raphael. Michael and Gabriel are the only angels mentioned by name in the Bible. The other two show up in the apocryphal *First Book of Enoch*, which includes a fanciful account of the actions of these four beings. Those who report modern day angel teachings are actually channeling information from demons.

4. Special knowledge or teachings from angels.

¹⁵ Gangel, p. 7.

¹⁶ Bohlin.

Naomi Albright distributes teachings about the deep meanings of colors, and numbers and letters of the alphabet which she claims is “knowledge given from above and brought forth in more detail by the High Angelic Master Sheate, Lady Master Cassandra, and Angel Carpelpous, and the Master Angel, One on High.” (*Paths of Light* newsletter, Angel Walk F.O.L., Followers of Light, No. 24, July 1994, p. 6-10). These same beings told Mrs. Albright to stress two main teachings: first, that God accepts all religions, and second, Reincarnation. (Albright, *Angel Walk*, p. 77-78). These two teachings keep showing up in much of the New Age angel literature, which shouldn’t be surprising since they are heretical lies that come from the pit of hell, which is where the angel teachers are from.

Other angel teachings are that all is a part of God (pantheism); the learner is set apart from others by the “deep” knowledge that the angels give (this is a basic draw to the occult); and that eventually, the one who pursues contact with these angels will be visited by an Ascended Master or a Shining Angel (which is a personal encounter with a demon).

We need to remember that God’s angels are not teachers. God’s word says they are messengers – that’s what “angel” means – and they minister to us. God has revealed to us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), so any hidden knowledge that spirit beings try to impart is by nature occultic and demonic.

5. Human divinity

The message of the ugly angels is that we need to recognize that we are one with the divine, we are divine. . . we are God. In Karen Goldman’s *The Angel Book: A Handbook for Aspiring Angels*, she says things like, “Angels don’t fall out of the sky; they emerge from within.” (Goldman, Karen, *The Angel Book – A Handbook for Aspiring Angels*, New York: Simon & Shuster, 1988, p. 20). And, “The whole purpose in life is to know your Angel Self, accept it and be it. In this way we finally experience true oneness.” (Ibid., p. 95).

The following bit of heretical garbage was channeled from a demon posing an angel named Daephrenocles: “The wondrous light of the Angels, from the Elohim to the Archangels

to the Devas and Nature Spirits, are all bringing to you the realization that you are magnificent – you are divine **now** and divine first.” (*These Celestial Times* newsletter, Vol. 3, No. 1, Gaithersburg, Maryland, p. 4).

Much of the angel literature refers to “the angel within.” But angels are a separate part of the creation. They were created before man as a different kind. They are not within us. The movie “It’s a Wonderful Life” notwithstanding, when we hear a bell ring it does not mean that an angel is getting his wings. Nor do good people, especially children, become angels when they die. We remain human beings – not angels, and certainly not God.

What our culture needs in response to the angel craze is strong discernment built on the foundation of God’s word. We need to remember, and share with others, three truths about angels:

1. The ministry of holy angels will never contradict the Bible.
2. The actions of holy angels will always be consistent with the character of Christ.
3. A genuine encounter with a holy angel will glorify God, not the angel. Holy angels never draw attention to themselves. They typically do their work and disappear.

It’s very true that many have “entertained angels unaware” (Hebrews 13:2). But we need to make sure we’re entertaining the right kind of angels!¹⁷

Some Warnings (Things to Do and Not to Do)

In addition to the above warnings and in view of the deceptions of Satan, we need to be on our guard. In this regard, here are a number of things that I would like to suggest.

Never Worship Angels

As pointed out in the introduction to this study, everywhere we find angels mentioned in the Bible, the reference to angels is incidental to some other issue. They are not the primary subject of the passage. God’s love and grace is. When they are

¹⁷ Bohlin.

mentioned, it is always in order to inform us further about God, what He does, and how He does it. This very fact should teach us that not only are angels not the focus, but they should certainly not be worshipped.

In two places in the book of Revelation, John was so awed by the revelation he had received from God through an angel, a very glorious creature, that he bowed down to worship the angel.

Revelation 19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

And then again in Revelation 22 we are told:

Revelation 22:8-9 And I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. 9 And he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book; worship God."

We told not to worship angels, but why? First, they are but "fellow servants" with believers called upon to serve the Lord. Then he was told to "worship God." Angels are powerful and awesome in many ways, but, like us, they are only creatures and servants of the living God who alone deserves our worship. This means we don't pray to them or trust in them, even though God may use them as our guardian. Our trust is to be in God, not angels. They minister at His bidding.

Remember, the church at Colossae had been invaded by false teachers who were teaching a false humility and the worship of angels, claiming special mystic insights by way of visions in connection with their worship of angels (Co. 2:18). This was demonic because it was usurping the preeminent place and sufficiency of Christ as Savior and Lord. The claim was, He is not enough for salvation and spirituality. What you need is to worship angels, etc.

Do Not Participate in Angel Gimmickry

Closely associated with the worship of angels, but in a more subtle way, is all the angel gimmickry going on in our culture today. Sometimes this is not just a matter of collecting and enjoying angel figurines much as someone would collect and

enjoy figurines and pictures of eagles. Regarding this, Gangel has a word of advice:

Of course there is nothing wrong with enjoying angel figurines on the coffee table as long as they do not become icons that somehow replace our dependence upon God's Word and the role of the indwelling Holy Spirit in our lives.¹⁸

Do Not Become Critical of the Reports of Angels

When we hear of reports of angels, it is only natural for us to be skeptical, but and there is the need for a certain amount of skepticism, what Gangel calls "healthy skepticism." The reasons a healthy skepticism is needed are the deceptions of Satan referred above and the spiritually bankrupt condition of our culture and its willingness to accept anything but the truth.

The gullibility of people today is due in part to pendulum swings of society. Society had swung from the gross mystical speculations of the middle ages to the rationalism of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Now due in part to the failure of rationalism, the vacuum that naturally occurs in the minds of people, and the rise of demonism and the occult in these last days, the pendulum has swung back to mysticism seen so prominently in the New Age movement, the occult, and in the cults. So belief in Satan, demons and angels is more and more common place, not because people are believing the Bible, but because of the rise of their spiritual emptiness. Angels have become an easy substitute, a handy compromise to the reality of the Living God as He is revealed in Scripture.

When asked "Do you believe in angels?" Jamal Mashburn, star forward of the Dallas Mavericks, responded, "Yes. For me it is like an inner voice that tells me what to do and what not to do, where to go and where not to go. It's somebody like God that protects and cares for me" (*Dallas Morning News*, 18 December 1994). Why not? God seems so distant and austere. Angels seem so friendly.¹⁹

On the other hand, angels are the ministering spirits of God and He can send them to anyone whom he pleases. I have never seen an angel or

¹⁸ Gangel, p. 7.

¹⁹ Gangel, p. 7.

had an experience where I was sure an angel was involved, but I do believe many reports are true.

A good friend of ours who has gone through a whole series of very difficult health problems told me last Sunday that at one point he was so low that he'd given up hope of ever getting well again. During the night a nurse came into his hospital room to check his IV and she said to him, "You seem to be really down and are without hope, aren't you?" He responded with, "Yes, I am." She knelt down, took his hand, and prayed for him. Afterward, his spirits picked up and he quickly began to improve physically. He never saw this nurse again, though he asked about her and watched for her. He told his doctor about this, who happened to be a Christian, and he asked my friend if he had considered that this might have been an angel. Was this angel? Perhaps. We simply don't know, but it certainly could be.

In addition, we need to avoid the critical spirit that questions and belittles the claims of others, especially those who do not know the Scripture. Laughing at or belittling their claims will only close the door to opportunities to witness and point them to the truth of the Gospel and the Bible.

Some Positive Things to Do

First, when confronted with claims of angels about which we are skeptical, let us seek ways to use these claims to show interest in the person and to engage them in discussion about the realities of the Savior or the truths of God's Word.

Second, let's be thankful to God for the ministry of angels and for those reports that do not contradict Scripture and may very well be genuine cases of angelic ministry. Even though we may not be able to validate that it was an angel, we can and should certainly praise God for the aid or encouragement experienced, as with my friend in the hospital.

Finally, let's know what the Bible teaches about God, Jesus Christ, salvation, true spirituality, and the ministry of angels that we might not fall for the satanic counterfeits that seek to cause people to bypass the sufficiency of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The book of Colossians is an excellent commentary on this.

Gangel closes his article on angels with the following fitting comment:

So you've never seen or heard an angel? Be patient—I guarantee it will happen. Like John

we'll all someday see and hear "the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand." With them we will praise the Savior singing, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Rev. 5:11-12).²⁰

²⁰ Gangel, p. 7.

Angelology: The Doctrine of Angels

Introduction

The fact that God has created a realm of personal beings other than mankind is a fitting topic for systematic theological studies for it naturally broadens our understanding of God, of what He is doing, and how He works in the universe.

We are not to think that man is the highest form of created being. As the distance between man and the lower forms of life is filled with beings of various grades, so it is possible that between man and God there exist creatures of higher than human intelligence and power. Indeed, the existence of lesser deities in all heathen mythologies presumes the existence of a higher order of beings between God and man, superior to man and inferior to God. This possibility is turned into certainty by the express and explicit teaching of the Scriptures. It would be sad indeed if we should allow ourselves to be such victims of sense perception and so materialistic that we should refuse to believe in an order of spiritual beings simply because they were beyond our sight and touch.²¹

The study of angels or the doctrine of *angelology* is one of the ten major categories of theology developed in many systematic theological works. The tendency, however, has been to neglect it. As Ryrie writes,

One has only to peruse the amount of space devoted to angelology in standard theologies to demonstrate this. This disregard for the doctrine may simply be neglect or it may indicate a tacit rejection of this area of biblical teaching. Even Calvin was cautious in discussing this subject (*Institutes*, I, xiv, 3).²²

Though the doctrine of angels holds an important place in the Word of God, it is often viewed as a difficult subject because, while there is abundant mention of angels in the Bible, the nature of this

revelation is without the same kind of explicit description we often find with other subjects developed in the Bible:

Every reference to angels is incidental to some other topic. They are not treated in themselves. God's revelation never aims at informing us regarding the nature of angels. When they are mentioned, it is always in order to inform us further about God, what he does, and how he does it. Since details about angels are not significant for that purpose, they tend to be omitted.²³

While many details about angels are omitted, it is important to keep in mind three important elements about the biblical revelation God has given us about angels.

(1) The mention of angels is inclusive in Scripture. In the NASB translation these celestial beings are referred to 196 times, 103 times in the Old Testament and 93 times in the New Testament.

(2) Further, these many references are scattered throughout the Bible being found in at least 34 books from the very earliest books (whether Job or Genesis) to the last book of the Bible (Revelation).

(3) Finally, there are numerous references to angels by the Lord Jesus, who is declared to be the Creator of all things, which includes the angelic beings. Paul wrote, "For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities (a reference to angels) — all things have been created by Him and for Him."

So while the mention of angels may seem incidental to some other subject contextually, it is an important element of divine revelation and should not be neglected, especially in view of the present craze and many misconceptions about angels. It is out of this extended body of Scripture, therefore, that the doctrine of angels, as presented in this study, will be developed. The objective is to make the Bible our authority rather than the speculations of men or their experiences or what may sound logical to people.

Though theologians have been cautious in their study of angels, in recent years we have been bombarded by what could easily be called *Angelmania*. In "Kindred Spirit" Dr. Kenneth

²¹ William Evans, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1912, p. 215.

²² Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1987, chapter 17, electronic media.

²³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1983, p. 434.

Gangel has written an article on the widespread discussion and fascination with angels even by the secular world which he entitled, *Angelmania*.²⁴ Gangel writes,

In his 1990 book *Angels: An Endangered Species*, Malcolm Godwin estimates that over the last 30 years one in every ten pop songs mentions an angel. But that was just romantic fun.

Now our culture takes angels seriously, if not accurately. In the last two years *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Redbook*, and a host of other popular magazines have carried articles about angels. In mid-1994, ABC aired a two-hour, prime time special titled "Angels: the Mysterious Messengers." In *Newsweek's* November 28, 1994 issue an article titled "In Search of the Sacred" observed that "20% of Americans have had a revelation from God in the last year, and 13% have seen or sensed the presence of an angel" (p. 54).

Newsweek is right; modern society, so seemingly secular and hopelessly materialistic, desperately searches for some spiritual and supernatural meaning. If angels can provide it, then angels it will be. Certainly they are more cheerful and brighter than our long-standing infatuation with movies about demons and evil spirits, along with endless Dracula revivals²⁵

The bookstores abound with books on angels and many claim encounters with angels. One of the major networks has a popular program entitled "Touched By An Angel." Certainly, this is just a story to entertain, but it does illustrate our fascination with this topic. In addition, it illustrates the very poor grasp of what the Bible really teaches about angels and about God. By these comments I do not mean to discount all the so-called encounters with angels that we occasionally read or hear about. Why? Because, as will be discussed in more detail later, angels are servants of God, described by the author of Hebrews as, "ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation." See also Psalm 91:11 and Matthew 4:11. So certainly, due to the inspired and inerrant character of Scripture, we can trust

completely in the Bible's teaching on angels and, "with a perhaps lesser degree of certainty, consider the personal accounts of reputable Christians."²⁶

There is an important question that needs to be asked. Why all the fascination of our culture with angels? First, there is always a bent in man for the miraculous or supernatural, for that which lifts him out of the mundane and pain of life, even if for a moment, but there is more to this issue. The interest in angels is due in part to pendulum swings of society. In the past, society had swung from the gross mystical speculations of the middle ages to the rationalism of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Now, due in part to the failure of rationalism and materialism to give answers and meaning to life, the emptiness of man's heart along with the futility of his pursuits has given rise to his interest in the mystical, in the supernatural, and in the spiritual. The tragedy is that our culture continues to pursue this independently of God's revelation, the Bible. The pendulum has swung back to mysticism as it is seen so prominently in the New Age movement, the occult, and in the cults. So belief in Satan, demons, and angels is more and more common place today and used as a substitute for a relationship with God through Christ. This predisposition is not because people are believing the Bible, but because of the rise of occult phenomena and the futility of life without God (see Eph. 2:12 and 4:17-19).

A Simple Definition

Angels are spiritual beings created by God to serve Him, though created higher than man. Some, the good angels, have remained obedient to Him and carry out His will, while others, fallen angels, disobeyed, fell from their holy position, and now stand in active opposition to the work and plan of God.

²⁴ "Kindred Spirit," a quarterly publication of Dallas Theological Seminary, Summer 1995, pp. 5-7.

²⁵ Gangel, p. 5.

²⁶ Gangel, p. 7.

The Terms Used of Angels

General Terms

Angel

Though other words are used for these spiritual beings, the primary word used in the Bible is *angel*. Three other terms undoubtedly referring to angels are *seraphim* (Isa. 6:2), *cherubim* (Ezek. 10:1-3), and *ministering spirits*, which is perhaps more of a description than a name (Heb. 1:13). More will be said on this later when dealing with the classification of angels.

The Hebrew word for angel is *mal'ach*, and the Greek word is *angelos*. Both words mean "messenger" and describe one who executes the purpose and will of the one whom they serve. The context must determine if a human messenger is in view, or one of the celestial beings called "angels," or if it is being used of the second Person of the Trinity as will be discussed below. The holy angels are messengers of God, serving Him and doing His bidding. The fallen angels serve Satan, the god of this world (*aiwn*, "age") (2 Cor. 4:4).

Illustrations of uses that do not refer to celestial beings:

- (1) For human messengers from one human to another (Luke 7:24; Jam. 2:25).
- (2) For human messengers bearing a divine message (Hag. 1:13; Gal. 4:14).
- (3) For an impersonal agent, Paul's thorn in the flesh described as "a messenger of Satan" (2 Cor. 12:7).
- (4) For the messengers of the seven churches (Rev. 2-3). It is also used in connection with the seven churches of Asia, "To the angel of the church in ..." Some take this to mean a special messenger or delegation to the church as a teaching elder, others take it to refer to a guardian angel.

Thus, the term *angelos* is not only a generic term, pertaining to a special order of beings (i.e., angels), but it is also descriptive and expressive of their office and service. So when we read the word "angel" we should think of it in this way.

Holy Ones

The unfallen angels are also spoken of as "holy ones" (Ps. 89:5, 7). The reason is twofold. First,

being the creation of a holy God, they were created perfect without any flaw or sin. Second, they are called holy because of their purpose. They were "set apart" by God and for God as His servants and as attendants to His holiness (cf. Isa. 6).

Host

"Host" is the Hebrew *tsaba*, "army, armies, hosts." It is a military term and carries the idea of warfare. Angels are referred to as the "host," which calls our attention to two ideas. First, it is used to describe God's angels as the "armies of heaven" who serve in the army of God engaged in spiritual warfare (Ps. 89:6, 8; 1 Sam. 1:11; 17:45). Second, it calls our attention to angels as a multitude of heavenly beings who surround and serve God as seen in the phrase "Lord of hosts" (Isa. 31:4). In addition, *tsaba* sometimes includes the host of heavenly bodies, the stars of the universe.

Difficult Terms

Sons of God

In their holy state, unfallen angels are called "sons of God" in the sense that they were brought into existence by the creation of God (Job 1:6; 38:7). Though they are never spoken of as created in the image of God, they may also be called "sons of God" because they possess personality like God. This will be demonstrated later in this study. This term is also used in Genesis 6:2 which tells us the "sons of God" took wives from among the "daughters of men." Some scholars understand "the sons of God" of Genesis 6:2 to refer to the sons of the godly line of Seth and the "daughters of men" to refer to the ungodly line of the Cainites. Others, in keeping with the use of "sons of God" in Job, believe the term refers to fallen angels who mated with the daughters of men to produce an extremely wicked and powerful progeny that led to the extreme wickedness of Noah's day. Most who hold to this latter view find further support in 2 Peter 2:4-6 and Jude 6-7.²⁷ Still others believe they refer to despots, powerful rulers. Ross writes:

²⁷ For an excellent discussion and support for this view, see Deffinbaugh's study on Genesis 6 in his study of the book of Genesis on our web site.

The incident is one of hubris, the proud overstepping of bounds. Here it applies to “the sons of God,” a lusty, powerful lot striving for fame and fertility. They were probably powerful rulers who were controlled (indwelt) by fallen angels. It may be that fallen angels left their habitation and inhabited bodies of human despots and warriors, the mighty ones of the earth.²⁸

The Angel of the Lord

The second difficulty concerns the identity of “the angel of the Lord” as it is used in the Old Testament. A careful study of the many passages using this term suggests that this is no ordinary angel, but a Theophany, or better, a Christophany, a preincarnate appearance of Christ. The angel is identified as God, speaks as God, and claims to exercise the prerogatives of God. Still, in some passages He distinguishes Himself from Yahweh (Gen. 16:7-14; 21:17-18; 22:11-18; 31:11-13, Ex. 3:2; Judg. 2:1-4; 5:23; 6:11-22; 13:3-22; 2 Sam. 24:16; Zech. 1:12; 3:1; 12:8). That the Angel of the Lord is a Christophany is suggested by the fact a clear reference to “the Angel of the Lord” ceases after the incarnation. References to an angel of the Lord in Luke 1:11; and 2:8 and Acts 5:19 lack the Greek article which would suggest an ordinary angel.

The Origin, Nature, and Number of Angels

Angels Are Created Beings

The Fact of Their Creation

That angels are created beings and not the spirits of departed or glorified human beings is brought out in Psalm 148. There the Psalmist calls on all in the celestial heavens, including the angels, to praise God. The reason given is, “For He commanded and they were created” (Ps. 148:1-5). The angels as well as the celestial heavens are declared to be created by God.

Since God is Spirit (John 4:24) it is natural to assume that there are created beings who more closely resemble God than do the mundane creatures who combine both the material and

²⁸ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, OT*, John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, Editors, Victor Books, Electronic Media.

immaterial. There is a material kingdom, an animal kingdom, and a human kingdom; So it may be assumed, there is an angelic or spirit kingdom. However, Angelology rests not upon reason or supposition, but upon revelation.²⁹

The Time of Their Creation

Though the exact time of their creation is never stated, we know they were created before the creation of the world. From the book of Job we are told that they were present when the earth was created (Job 38:4-7) so their creation was prior to the creation of the earth as described in Genesis one.

The Agent of Their Creation

Scripture specifically states that Christ, as the one who created all things, is the creator of angels (cf. John 1:1-3 with Col. 1:16).

The Son’s Creation includes “all” things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. These indicate the *entire* universe, both material and immaterial. A highly organized hierarchy of angelic beings is referred to with the word “thrones” (*qronoi*), “powers” (*kuriotthes*), “rulers” (*arca*), and “authorities” (*exousia*). This not only indicates a highly organized dominion in the spirit world of angels, but shows that Paul was writing to refute an incipient form of Gnosticism that promoted the worship of angels in place of the worship of Christ (cf. Col. 2:18). In this, Paul demonstrates superiority and rightful place of worship as supreme (cf. Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Phil. 2:9-10; Col. 2:10, 15).³⁰

The Nature and Number of Their Creation

The angels were created simultaneously as a host or a company. God created man and the animal kingdom in pairs with the responsibility and ability to procreate. Angels, however, were created simultaneously as a company, a countless host of myriads (Col. 1:16; Neh. 9:6). This is suggested by the fact they are not subject to death or any form of extinction and they do not

²⁹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, Kregel Publications, 1993, p. 3.

³⁰ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, NT*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Editors, Victor Books, 1983, electronic media.

propagate or multiply themselves as with humans. Hebrews 9:27 says, "... it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment." While fallen angels will be judged in the future and permanently confined to the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41; 1 Cor. 6:4; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6), there is never any mention of the death of angels (see Luke 20:36). Nevertheless, they are an innumerable host created before the creation of the earth (cf. Job 38:7; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 148:2, 5; Heb. 12:22; Dan. 7:10; Matt. 26:53; Rev. 5:11; with Matt. 22:28-30; Luke 20:20-36).

Angels Are Spirit Beings

Their Abode

Statements like, "the angels which are in heaven" (Mark 13:32) and "an angel from heaven" suggest that angels have fixed abodes or centers for their activities. However, due to the ministry and abilities given to them in the service of God, they have access to the entire universe. They are described as serving in heaven and on earth (cf. Isa. 6:1f; Dan. 9:21; Rev. 7:2; 10:1).

Though fallen angels seem to have an abode other than heaven itself, no specific location is given except that Satan will be bound in the "Abyss" for the thousand years after the Second Coming before he is released (Rev. 20:3). Likewise the plague which seems to be demonic is spoken of as coming from the Abyss (9:1-30). Fallen angels also have a king who is referred to as "the angel of the Abyss" (vs. 11). The destiny of fallen angels is the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41). The holy angels will dwell in the new heavens and new earth described in Revelation 21-22.³¹

The reference to "the Abyss" brings up another important element regarding the abode of the fallen angels. Ryrie writes:

The Scriptures clearly indicate two groups of fallen angels, one consisting of those who have some freedom to carry out Satan's plans, and the other who are confined. Of those who are confined, some are temporarily so, while others are permanently confined in Tartarus (2

Peter 2:4 and Jude 6). The Greeks thought of Tartarus as a place of punishment lower than hades. *Those temporarily confined are in the abyss* (Luke 8:31; Rev. 9:1-3, 11), some apparently consigned there to await final judgment while others will be loosed to be active on the earth (vv. 1-3, 11, 14; 16:14).³² (emphasis mine)

Jude also speaks of an abode for angels:

Jude 1:6 And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.

While the meaning of this passage is debated, it does show us that angels not only have a domain or area of authority assigned to them, but a dwelling place.

The most likely reference here is to the angels ("sons of God," cf. Gen. 6:4; Job 1:6; 2:1) who came to earth and mingled with women. This interpretation is expounded in the pseudepigraphical Book of Enoch (7, 9.8, 10.11; 12.4), from which Jude quotes in v. 14, and is common in the intertestamental literature and the early church fathers (e.g., Justin Apology 2.5). These angels "did not keep their positions of authority" (*ten heauton archen*). The use of the word *arche* for "rule," "dominion," or "sphere" is uncommon but appears to be so intended here (cf. BAG, p. 112). The implication is that God assigned angels stipulated responsibilities (*arche*, "dominion") and a set place (*oiketerion*). But because of their rebellion, God has kept or reserved (*tetereken* perfect tense) these fallen angels in darkness and in eternal chains awaiting final judgment. Apparently some fallen angels are in bondage while others are unbound and active among mankind as demons.³³

Their Immaterialness

Though at times they have revealed themselves in the form of human bodies (angelophanies) as in Genesis 18:3, they are described as "spirits" in Hebrews 1:14. This suggests they do not have material bodies as humans do. This is further supported by the fact they do not function as

³¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Lewis Sperry Chafer Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, Part 3, Abridged Edition, John F. Walvoord, Editor, Donald K. Campbell, Roy B. Zuck, Consulting Editors, Victor Books, Wheaton, Ill., 1988, p. 284.

³² Ryrie, p. 159.

³³ Frank E. Gaebelin, General Editor, *The Expositors' Bible Commentary*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, electronic media, 1997.

human beings in terms of marriage and procreation (Mark 12:25) nor are they subject to death (Luke 20:36).

Mankind, including our incarnate Lord, is “lower than the angels” (Heb. 2:7). Angels are not subject to the limitations of man, especially since they are incapable of death (Luke 20:36). Angels have greater wisdom than man (2 Sam. 14:20), yet it is limited (Matt. 24:36). Angels have greater power than man (Matt. 28:2; Acts 5:19; 2 Pet. 2:11), yet they are limited in power (Dan. 10:13).

Angels, however, have limitations compared to man, particularly in future relationships. Angels are not created in the image of God, therefore, they do not share man’s glorious destiny of redemption in Christ. At the consummation of the age, redeemed man will be exalted above angels (1 Cor. 6:3).³⁴

Millard Erickson writes:

That angels are spirits may also be inferred from the following considerations:

Demons (fallen angels) are described as spirits (Matt. 8:16; 12:45; Luke 7:21; 8:2; 11:26; Acts 19:12; Rev. 16:14).

We are told that our struggle is not against “flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

Paul, in Colossians 1:16, seems to identify the heavenly forces as invisible.

That angels are spirits seems to follow (although not necessarily from Jesus’ assertions that angels do not marry (Matt. 22:30) and do not die (Luke 20:36).³⁵

Angels, though spirit beings and very powerful, are not omnipotent, omniscient, nor omnipresent. They cannot be everywhere at once.

Their Appearance

Since they are spirit beings, they are usually not seen, unless God gives the ability to see them or

unless they manifest themselves. Balaam could not see the angel standing in his way until the Lord opened his eyes (Num. 22:31) and Elisha’s servant could not see the host of angels surrounding him until Elisha prayed for his eyes to be opened (2 Kings 6:17). When angels have been seen as recorded in Scripture, they were often mistaken as men because they were manifested in a man-like appearance (Gen. 18:2, 16, 22; 19:1, 5, 10, 12, 15, 16; Judg. 13:6; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4). Sometimes, they appear in a way that either manifests God’s glory (Luke 2:9; 9:26) or in some form of brilliant apparel (cf. Matt. 28:3; John 20:12; Acts 1:10 with Ezek. 1:13; Dan. 10:6). Consistently, they have appeared as real men, never as ghosts, or as winged animals (cf. Gen. 18:2; 19:1; Mark 16:3; Luke 24:4).

They are occasionally pictured in other forms and in other manifestations as with wings, and as a combination of man, beast, and birds as in Ezekiel 1:5f and Isaiah 6:6. But apparently such manifestations only occurred by way of a vision or special revelation from God. No angel literally appeared in such form.

They also seem to always have appeared as youthful or mature men (Mark 16:5), but never as old men, perhaps because they neither age nor die (Luke 20:36).

In the present fascination of our culture, previously referred to as *angelmania*, the common conception of angels is that of winged creatures and most times as female.

Some of the commonly held conceptions are not supported by the scriptural witness. There are no indications of angels appearing in female form. Nor is there explicit reference to them as winged, although Daniel 9:21 and Revelation 14:6 speak of them as flying. The cherubim and seraphim are represented as winged (Exod. 25:20; Isa. 6:2), as are the symbolic creatures of Ezekiel 1:6 (cf. Rev. 4:8). However, we have no assurance that what is true of cherubim and seraphim is true of angels in general. Since there is no explicit reference indicating that angels as a whole are winged, we must regard this as at best an inference, but not a necessary inference, from the biblical passages which describe them as flying.³⁶

³⁴ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1996, electronic media.

³⁵ Erickson, p. 439.

³⁶ Erickson, p. 440.

While angels generally appear as men in Scripture, Zechariah 5:9 may suggest this is not always the case. The two women mentioned in this passage are not specifically called angels, but they are clearly agents of God or forces of Satan, like angels, good or evil.

Their Holiness

All angels were created *holy*, without sin, and in a state of perfect holiness.

Originally all angelic creatures were created holy. God pronounced His creation good (Gen. 1:31), and, of course, He could not create sin. Even after sin entered the world, God's good angels, who did not rebel against Him, are called holy (Mark 8:38). These are the elect angels (1 Tim. 5:21) in contrast to the evil angels who followed Satan in his rebellion against God (Matt. 25:41).³⁷

Their Creatureliness

As created beings, they are of course mere *creatures*. They are not divine and their worship is explicitly forbidden (see Col. 2:18; Rev. 19:10; 22:9). As a separate order of creatures, they are both distinct from human beings and higher than humans with powers far beyond human abilities in this present age (cf. 1 Cor. 6:3; Heb. 1:14; 2:7). But as creatures they are limited in their powers, knowledge, and activities (1 Peter 1:11-12; Rev. 7:1). Like all of creation, angels are under God's authority and subject to His judgment (1 Cor. 6:3; Matt. 25:41).

Following the revelation given to John, on two occasions the apostle fell on his face in worship, but the angel quickly told John not to worship him and then gave the reason. Angels are but "fellow servants" and called upon to serve God as all God's creatures should. So John was told to "worship God." The worship of angels (as with any other object of worship) distracts from the worship of God and attributes godlike powers to the object of worship. Angels are powerful and awesome in many ways, but, like us, they are only creatures and servants of the living God who alone deserves our worship. This means we are not to pray to them or trust in them even though God may use them to minister to our needs in various ways. Our trust is to be in God, not

³⁷ Ryrie, p. 124.

angels. They minister to us at His bidding under His authority and power. Though sometimes the instrument of aid or deliverance was an angel, New Testament believers recognized it was the Lord who delivered them (see Acts 12:11).

In Acts 27:23-25, Luke recounted Paul's experience with an angel who brought him a message from the Lord, but there was no worship of the angel. Instead, Paul's faith was in the God he served.

23 For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, 24 saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' 25 "Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God, that it will turn out exactly as I have been told.

Though writing about their invisibility to mankind, Chafer has an interesting comment:

One reason angels are rendered invisible to human sight may be that, if they were seen, they would be worshiped. Man, who is so prone to idolatry as to worship the works of his own hands, would hardly be able to resist the worship of angels were they before his eyes.³⁸

The church at Colossae had been invaded by false teachers who were teaching a false humility and the worship of angels as a part of the means to spirituality. It seems these teachers were claiming special mystic insights by way of visions in connection with their worship of angels.

Concerning this, Paul wrote:

Colossians 2:18 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 (NIV).

The person attempting to make such judgment is described as one "who delights in false humility and the worship of angels." The context suggests that he seeks to impose these things on the Colossians and that this is the means by which he attempts to disqualify them for their prize.³⁹

³⁸ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, Kregel Publications, 1993, p. 8.

³⁹ Gabelein, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, electronic media.

This was demonic because it was an attempt to usurp the preeminent place and sufficiency of Christ as Savior and Lord (cf. Col. 2:10). It is no wonder, then, that the author of Hebrews, in the most extended passage on angels in the New Testament (Heb. 1:5-29), demonstrates the superiority of Christ to even the mighty angels (Heb. 1:2-4, 13). In this he concludes his argument with a question designed to show that Christ, God's very Son and the radiance of His glory who sits at God's right hand, is superior to angels for he asked, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?" (Heb. 1:14).

Their Personalities

There are several qualities common to personality all of which angels possess – personal existence, intellect, emotion, and will. As personalities we see them interacted with over and over again through the Bible. Ryrie writes:

Angels then qualify as personalities because they have these aspects of intelligence, emotions, and will. This is true of both the good and evil angels. Good angels, Satan, and demons possess intelligence (Matt. 8:29; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Peter 1:12). Good angels, Satan, and demons show emotions (Luke 2:13; James 2:19; Rev. 12:17). Good angels, Satan, and demons demonstrate that they have wills (Luke 8:28-31; 2 Tim. 2:26; Jude 6). Therefore, they can be said to be persons. The fact that they do not have human bodies does not affect their being personalities (any more than it does with God).⁴⁰

The fallen angels are even described by actions of personality like lying and sinning (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8-10). Some have considered angels, including Satan, as merely the abstract personification of good and evil, but such is not at all in keeping with the teaching of Scripture.

Their Abilities and Powers

Their Knowledge: Jesus said, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone" (Matt. 24:36). This comment by the Lord suggest two things: (1) The phrase, "not even the angels" implies that angels have superhuman knowledge, but (2) the

main statement of this verse shows they are limited in their knowledge, they are not omniscient. That their knowledge is greater is also suggested by the fact they were present at some of the heavenly counsels, were involved in conveying revelation (Gal. 3:19), and were used of God to interpret visions as with Daniel and Zechariah.

Ryrie suggests three reasons for their superior knowledge:

(1) Angels were created as a higher order of creatures in the universe than humans are. Therefore, innately they possess greater knowledge. (2) Angels study the Bible more thoroughly than some humans do and gain knowledge from it (James 2:19; Rev. 12:12). (3) Angels gain knowledge through long observation of human activities. Unlike humans, angels do not have to study the past; they have experienced it. Therefore, they know how others have acted and reacted in situations and can predict with a greater degree of accuracy how we may act in similar circumstances. The experiences of longevity give them greater knowledge.⁴¹

Their Strength: Since man is created lower than the angels with limitations angels do not have, we would expect them to possess superhuman strength as well. That angels have greater strength than man is evident from at least two considerations:

(1) Specific Statements in Scripture: Scripture specifically speaks of their greater power. Psalm 103:20 at least implies their greater strength in the statement, "Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word." Then, 2 Thessalonians 1:7 refers to the return of the Lord with His mighty angels in flaming fire. Further, 2 Peter 2:11 reads, "whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord." The only question here is who is being compared? The major subject of the context is that of the false teachers (humans beings), however, due to verse 10, some believe the comparison is being made between the "angelic majesties" of verse 10, good angels and evil angels. If so, then the verse is stating that the good angels are more powerful than the evil ones.

⁴⁰ Ryrie, p. 125.

⁴¹ Ryrie, p. 125.

(2) Their Activities as Described in Scripture:

Though their great power is always a derived power from God, the mighty works they accomplish, as in the execution of God's judgments, demonstrate their superhuman strength (cf. 2 Chron. 32:21; Acts 12:7-11; and the many references to angelic activities in Revelation). In this regard, Elisha's confidence and prayer for his servant to see the myriad of angels surrounding them in the face of the human forces, suggests their greater power (2 Kings 6:15-17). His confidence was certainly not simply in their greater numbers. Illustrations of their power are seen in Acts 5:19; 12:7, 23; Matthew 28:2 (the stone rolled away by the angel weighed about 4 tons).

The Psalmist exclaimed, "Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, Who alone works wonders" (Ps. 72:18). All miraculous power has its source in God. As angelic creatures, they are subject to the limitations of their creatureliness. They are mighty, but not almighty. Even Satan, a fallen angel, with his angelic powers must operate under the permissive will of God (Job 1:12; 2:6).

Their Position***In Regard to Man***

By creation man is lower than the angels (Heb. 2:7-9). Angels are higher in intelligence, power, and movement, yet angels serve men as ministering spirits (Heb. 1:14) sent forth to serve the saints regardless of their high position and power. As mentioned, men are warned to never worship angels for they are only creatures.

Today believers are experientially lower than the angels, yet positionally higher because of their union in Christ (cf. Eph 1:20-22; with Eph 2:4-6 and Heb 2:9). Christians share Christ's seat at God's right hand. One day, however, believers will be both positionally and experientially higher and will judge angels (1 Cor 6:3). This undoubtedly refers to some kind of governmental direction believers will have over angels.

With Reference to Christ

By His essential nature and being, Christ is higher because He is God the Creator (cf. Heb 1:4ff with Col. 1:15-17). By Christ's incarnation He became lower for a little while (Heb 2:9), but this only applied to His humanity. By Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension He became far

superior to angels as the last Adam and the second man (cf. 1 Cor. 15:45-48; Eph. 1:20-22; 1 Pet. 3:18-22; Col. 2:15). As the glorified and exalted God-man He became the last Adam. Adam was the head of the first race of men, but Christ became the head of the second race of regenerated men. He is called last because there will never be another fall, and because He, as the glorified and exalted Savior, is a life-giving Spirit. As the second man from heaven He is viewed as the head and beginning of a new and exalted race of people.

The Division of Angels – Good and Evil

While all the angels were originally created holy and without sin, there was a rebellion by Satan, who, being lifted up by his own beauty, rebelled and sought to exalt himself above God. In his rebellion, he took with him one-third of the angels (Rev. 12:4). This rebellion and fall is probably described for us in Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:15 embodied in the kings of Babylon and Tyre.⁴² Prophesying of a future angelic conflict that will occur in the middle of the Tribulation, John wrote, "And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war" (Rev. 12:7). In other words, there are good angels and there are evil angels. Regarding their fall, Bushwell writes:

We infer that the angels which sinned did so in full knowledge of all the issues involved. They chose self-corruption, knowing exactly what they were doing. They sinned without remedy, and there is no atonement for them (II Peter 2:4; Jude 6). On the other hand, it seems that the holy angels, being faced with the same ethical choice and possessing the same God-given ability to choose, remained and are confirmed in their state of holiness. They have never known the experience of sin.⁴³

⁴² The terms and descriptions given there certainly go far beyond that of any human monarch. Further, other passages clearly teach us that there are often angelic or demonic forces behind the reign of human kings or kingdoms (cf. Dan. 10; and Eph. 6:10-12).

⁴³ James Oliver Bushwell Jr., *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1962, p. 134.

As is clear from Revelation 12:7 and many other passages, the leader of these fallen angels, or demons as they are also called, is Satan (cf. Matt. 12:25-27). As the leader of these unholy angels, Satan is a liar, a murderer, and a thief (John 10:10). As God's great antagonist, Satan hates God and His people and is constantly on the prowl like a roaring lion in search of those he may devour by his nefarious schemes (1 Peter 5:8). As an angelic being, Satan, along with his demon-like angels, is supernaturally powerfully and brilliant, and uses all his powers against humanity. Not only is he a liar, a thief, and a distorer, but one of his chief characterizations is deception. John describes him as the one "who deceives the whole world" (John 12:9). In his cunning, he disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). In view of this, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness ..." (2 Cor. 11:15).

The Organization of Angels

The Fact of Angelic Organization

While the Bible's revelation on the organization of angels is rather meager, it says enough to show us there does seem to be organization in the angelic world. They appear to be organized into various ranks and orders and positions. This is suggested by the fact Michael is called the Archangel or chief angel (Jude 9). Then, in Daniel 10:13 he is called one of the chief princes. Other ranks and orders are suggested by the terms used of angels in Ephesians 3:10; 6:12, and 1 Peter 3:22. Ryrie writes:

The Scriptures speak of the "assembly" and "council" of the angels (Ps. 89:5, 7), of their organization for battle (Rev. 12:7), and of a king over the demon-locusts (9:11). They are also given governmental classifications which indicate organization and ranking (Eph. 3:10, good angels; and 6:12, evil angels). Unquestionably God has organized the elect angels and Satan has organized the evil angels. A very important practical point emerges from this. Angels are organized; demons are organized; yet Christians, individually and in groups, often feel that it is unnecessary that they be organized. This is especially true when it comes to fighting evil. Believers sometimes feel that they can "go it alone" or expect victory without any prior, organized

preparation and discipline. It is also true when it comes to promoting good. Believers sometimes miss the best because they do not plan and organize their good works.⁴⁴

This is further supported by Jude's statement regarding the angels who left their "domain" (NASB) or "positions of authority" (NIV) in Jude 6. "Domain" is the Greek arch, which can mean, "domain, rule, authority," or "sphere of influence."⁴⁵

The Classifications of Angels

Paul Enns provides us with an excellent overview of most of the various rankings or classifications of the organized angelic world.

Angels who are governmental rulers.

Ephesians 6:12 refers to "ranking of fallen angels": *rulers* are "those who are first or high in rank"; *powers* are "those invested with authority"; *world-forces of this darkness* "expresses the power or authority which they exercise over the world"; *spiritual forces of wickedness* describes the wicked spirits, "expressing their character and nature." 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; he was a demon "of high rank, assigned by the chief of demons, Satan, to Persia as his special area of activity" (cf. Rev. 12:7).

Angels who are highest ranking. Michael is called the *archangel* in Jude 9 and the great prince in Daniel 12:1. Michael is the only angel designated archangel, and may possibly be the only one of this rank. The mission of the archangel is protector of Israel. (He is called "Michael your prince" in Dan. 10:21.) There were *chief princes* (Dan. 10:13), of whom Michael was one, as the highest ranking angels of God. *Ruling angels* (Eph. 3:10) are also mentioned, but no further details are given.

Angels who are prominent individuals. (1) Michael (Dan. 10:13; 12:1; Jude 9). The name

⁴⁴ Ryrie, p. 128.

⁴⁵ Walter Bauer, Wilbur F. Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, electronic media.

Michael means “who is like God?” and identifies the only one classified as an archangel in Scripture. Michael is the defender of Israel who will wage war on behalf of Israel against Satan and his hordes in the Tribulation (Rev. 12:7-9). Michael also disputed with Satan about the body of Moses, but Michael refrained from judgment, leaving that to God (Jude 9). Jehovah’s Witnesses and some Christians identify Michael as Christ; this view, however, would suggest Christ has less authority than Satan, which is untenable.

(2) Gabriel (Dan. 9:21; Luke 1:26). His name means “man of God” or “God is strong.” “Gabriel seems to be God’s special messenger of His kingdom program in each of the four times he appears in the Bible record ... He reveals and interprets God’s purpose and program concerning Messiah and His kingdom to the prophets and people of Israel.” In a highly significant passage, Gabriel explained the events of the seventy weeks for Israel (Dan. 9:21-27). In Luke 1:26-27 Gabriel told Mary that the One born to her would be great and rule on the throne of David. In Daniel 8:15-16 Gabriel explained to Daniel the succeeding kingdoms of Medo-Persia and Greece as well as the untimely death of Alexander the Great. Gabriel also announced the birth of John the Baptist to Zacharias (Luke 1:11-20).

(3) Lucifer (Isa. 14:12) means “shining one” or “star of the morning.” 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.

Angels who are divine attendants. (1) *Cherubim* are “of the highest order or class, created with indescribable powers and beauty ... Their main purpose and activity might be summarized in this way: they are proclaimers and protectors of God’s glorious presence, His sovereignty, and His holiness.” They stood guard at the gate of the Garden of Eden, preventing sinful man from entering (Gen. 3:24); were the golden figures covering the mercy seat above the ark in the Holy of Holies (Exod. 25:17-22); and attended the glory of God in Ezekiel’s vision (Ezek. 1). Cherubim had an extraordinary appearance with four faces—that of a man, lion, ox, and eagle. They had four wings and feet like a calf, gleaming

like burnished bronze. In Ezekiel 1 they attended the glory of God preparatory for judgment.

(2) *Seraphim*, meaning “burning ones,” are pictured surrounding the throne of God in Isaiah 6:2. They are described as each having six wings. In their threefold proclamation, “holy, holy, holy” (Isa. 6:3), it means “to recognize God as extremely, perfectly holy. Therefore, they praise and proclaim the perfect holiness of God. The seraphim also express the holiness of God in that they proclaim that man must be cleansed of sin’s moral defilement before he can stand before God and serve Him.”⁴⁶

Regarding the governmental rulers in the angelic world, Ryrie described this as follows:

1. *Rulers or principalities.* These words, used seven times by Paul, indicate an order of angels both good and evil involved in governing the universe (Rom. 8:38; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15).
2. *Authorities or powers.* This likely emphasizes the superhuman authority of angels and demons exercised in relation to the affairs of the world (Eph. 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15; 1 Peter 3:22).
3. *Powers.* This word underscores the fact that angels and demons have greater power than humans (2 Peter 2:11). See Ephesians 1:21 and 1 Peter 3:22.
4. *Place of rule.* In one place demons are designated as world rulers of this darkness (Eph. 6:12).
5. *Thrones or dominions.* This designation emphasizes the dignity and authority of angelic rulers in God’s use of them in His government (Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16; 2 Peter 2:10; Jude 8).⁴⁷

Some question whether the Seraphim and Cherubim are actually angels since they are never clearly identified as angels, but due to the nature of angels and their service as superhuman servants of God, this is the most logical place to

⁴⁶ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1996.

⁴⁷ Ryrie, p. 129.

classify them. It would be helpful to also consider Ryrie's explanation of these angelic beings:

Cherubim: Cherubim constitute another order of angels, evidently of high rank since Satan was a cherub (Ezek. 28:14, 16). They seem to function as guardians of the holiness of God, having guarded the way to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24). The use of cherubim in the decoration of the tabernacle and temple may also indicate their guarding function (Ex. 26:1ff.; 36:8ff.; 1 Kings 6:23-29). They also bore the throne-chariot which Ezekiel saw (Ezek. 1:4-5; 10:15-20). Some also identify the four living ones of Revelation 4:6 as cherubim, though others feel these represent the attributes of God. Representations of the cherubim will also be a part of the millennial temple (Ezek. 41:18-20).

Seraphim: All we know about this rank of angelic beings is found in Isaiah 6:2, 6. Apparently the seraphim were an order similar to the cherubim. They acted as attendants at the throne of God and agents of cleansing. Their duty also was to praise God. Their description suggests a six-winged humanlike creature. The word may be derived from a root meaning "to burn" or possibly from a root which means "to be noble."⁴⁸

Three other classification of angels remain:

1. **Elect Angels:** In 1 Timothy 5:21, Paul speaks of "the elect angels." These are the holy angels who are somehow included in the elect purposes of God. These are angels who did not follow after Satan in his rebellion. There is little revealed about their election, but apparently there was a probationary period for the angelic world and these, being the elect of God, remained faithful and are confirmed in their holy state in the service of the Lord. As Chafer writes, "The fall of some angels is no more unanticipated by God than the fall of man. It may be implied, also that angels have passed a period of probation."⁴⁹
2. **The Living Creatures:** These are angelic creatures who seem to be involved with

revealing the glory of the God of Israel in His omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence (Ezek. 1:5f; Rev. 4:6; 6:1). Ezekiel 10:15, 20 reveal them as cherubim. Through the four faces, they may also anticipate what God would do to bring salvation to man through His Son: (a) The face of the man suggests wisdom, compassion, intelligence and pictures Christ's humanity as the Son of man, the special focus found in the gospel of Luke; (b) the face of a lion speaks of kingly appearance and pictures Christ as King which is Matthew's emphasis; (c) the face of a bull or ox portrays a servant, the emphasis seen in Mark; and (d) the face of an eagle speaks of heavenly action and portrays the deity Christ, which is John's emphasis.

3. **Watchers:** "Watchers" is an Aramaic word which means, "vigilant, waking, watchful." Verse 17 may infer this is a special type of angel (if a special class is intended). It seems to describe holy angels who are constantly vigilant to serve the Lord and who watch over the rulers of the world and the affairs of men (Dan. 4:13, 17, 23). The added description, "a holy one" in verse 13 may imply there are unholy watchers, i.e., demonic forces who are watching the affairs of men and seeking to influence and destroy.

Special Angels

Angels Associated With the Tribulation

In Revelation a number of angels are specifically associated with certain judgments that will be poured out on the earth like the seven trumpets and the seven last plagues (Rev. 8-9; 16). In addition, some angels are related to special functions given to them, at least in these last days. There is the angel who has power over fire (Rev. 14:18), the angel of the waters (9:11), the angel of the abyss who will bind Satan (20:1-2).

Angels Associated With the Church

In Revelation 2-3, each of the seven letters to the seven churches is addressed to "the angel of the church of ...". In addition, they are each seen to be in the right hand of Christ in the vision of chapter one (Rev. 1:16, 20). However, since the term for

⁴⁸ Ryrie, pp. 129-130.

⁴⁹ Chafer, p. 17.

angel means “messenger” and is also used of men, there is debate over whether these references refer to angelic beings or to the human leaders of the seven churches. It could refer to a guardian angel over these churches or to those men who function in the capacity of teachers of the Word, like the human pastors or elders.

The Ministry of Angels

The most basic characteristic of the good angels is seen in the way they are described in Hebrews 1:14 as ministering spirits and in the accounts of their many and varied activities of ministry as described in Scripture. Essentially, they function as priestly messengers (*leitourgika pneumatata*) in the temple-universe of God.⁵⁰ From the account of their activities in the Bible, their service can be summarized as that of (1) the worship of God (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8), (2) as messengers of God (Dan. 9:22; Luke 1:11, 26; 2:9; Rev. 1:1), (3) as soldiers in spiritual combat (Dan. 10:13f; Rev. 12:7), and (4) as ministers to God’s people (Heb. 1:14). Regarding their activity as ministering spirits, Bushwell comments:

The question may be asked, if we are not to worship the angels, or in any way pray to them, what is the value of the doctrine that they are “ministering spirits”? In answer we can say at least that the Scriptural teaching in regard to the ministry of the angels is a beautiful enrichment of our conception of God’s government of the world.⁵¹

As God’s celestial servants who carry out His purposes, we may observe that their ministry falls into several different relationships:⁵²

In Relation to God: In their service to God, they are seen as attendants around His throne, waiting to serve Him and do His bidding (Ps. 103:20; Isa. 6:1f; Job 1:6; 2:1; Rev. 5:11; 8:1f), as worshippers in praise of Him (Isa. 6:3; Ps. 148:1-2; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 5:12), as observers who rejoice over what He does (Job 38:6-7; Luke 2:12-13; 15:10), as soldiers in

battle with Satan (Rev. 12:7), and as instruments of His judgments (Rev. 7:1; 8:2).

In Relation to the Nations: In relation to the nation of Israel, Michael, the archangel, seems to have a very important ministry as their guardian (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9). In relation to other nations, they watch over rulers and nations (Dan. 4:17) and seek to influence their human leaders (Dan. 10:21; 11:1). In the Tribulation they will be the agents God uses to pour out His judgments (see Rev. 8-9 and 16).

In Relation to Christ: with the plan of God centering in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, they naturally perform many services for the Savior.

- **In relation to His birth**, they predicted it (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:26-28) and then announced his birth (Luke 2:8-15). An angel warned Joseph to take Mary and the baby Jesus and flee into Egypt (Matt. 2:13-15), and an angel directed the family to return to Israel after Herod died (vv. 19-21).
- **In relation to His suffering**, angels ministered to Him after His temptation (4:11), in His stress in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:43), and Jesus said He could have called a legion of angels who stood ready to come to His defense if He so desired (Matt. 26:53).
- **In relation to His resurrection**, an angel rolled away the stone from the tomb (28:1-2), angels announced His resurrection to the women on Easter morning (vv. 5-6; Luke 24:5-7), and angels were present at His ascension and gave instruction to the disciples (Acts 1:10-11).
- **In relation to His coming again**, the voice of the archangel will be heard at the translation of the church (1 Thess. 4:16), they will accompany Him in His glorious return to earth (Matt. 25:31; 2 Thess. 1:7) and they will separate the wheat from the tares at Christ’s second coming (Matt. 13:39-40).

In Relation to the Unrighteous: Angels not only announce and inflict judgment (Gen. 19:13; Rev. 14:6-7; Acts 12:23; Rev. 16:1), but they will separate the righteous from the unrighteous (Matt. 13:39-40).

⁵⁰ Ryrie, p. 131.

⁵¹ James Oliver Bushwell Jr., *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1962, p. 133.

⁵² The material covering the ministry of angels in their various relationships is adapted from Ryries, *Basic Theology*, pp. 131-132.

In Relation to the Church: Hebrews 1:14 describes their ministry as “ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation.” In this, however, Scripture points to a number of specific ministries: they bring answers to prayer (Acts 12:5-10), they help in bringing people to the Savior (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).

In Relation to New Epochs: Ryrie points out that angels appear to be unusually active when God institutes a new epoch in the sweep of history and then outlines this for us:

- A. They Joined in Praise When the Earth Was Created (Job 38:6-7)
- B. They Were Involved in the Giving of the Mosaic Law (Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2)
- C. They Were Active at the First Advent of Christ (Matt. 1:20; 4:11)
- D. They Were Active During the Early Years of the Church (Acts 8:26; 10:3, 7; 12:11)
- E. They Will Be Involved in Events Surrounding the Second Advent of Christ (Matt. 25:31; 1 Thes. 4:1)⁵³

Of course, the ministry of angels occurred at other times, but the question naturally arises, especially in view of our present day fascination with angels, is there biblical evidence these varied ministries of angels continue to function in the present age of the church?

Whether angels continue to function in all these ways throughout the present age is uncertain. But they did perform these ministries and may well continue to do so even though we are not aware of them. Of course, God is not obliged to use angels; He can do all these things directly. But seemingly He chooses to employ the intermediate ministry of angels on many occasions. Nevertheless, the believer recognizes that it is the Lord who does these things whether directly through using angels (notice Peter’s testimony that the Lord delivered him from the prison though God actually used an angel to accomplish it, Acts 12:7-10 compared with vv. 11 and 17).

Perhaps an inscription I once saw in an old church in Scotland states the balance well.

⁵³ Ryrie, p. 131.

“Though God’s Power Be Sufficient to Govern Us,
Yet for Man’s Infirmity He appointed His
Angels to Watch over Us.”⁵⁴

Hebrews 13:2 reads, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it” (NIV). Entertaining angels unawares brings to mind Abraham (Gen. 18:1ff.) and Lot (Gen. 19:1ff.), but even this statement does not prove angels function today as in Old and New Testament times. As Ryrie points out, “The word “angel” may refer to superhuman beings (see Gen. 18:1-8 for an example of such entertaining) or it may refer to a human being who is a messenger from God (see James 2:25 for an example of such entertaining).”⁵⁵

Perhaps no aspect of their ministry to man is more talked about than the idea of “a guardian angel.” People often ask, “Does everyone have a guardian angel?” The concept that every person has a specific guardian angel is only by implication from the statement that angels do guard or protect as Psalm 91:11 declares. But this passage is directed to those who make the Lord their refuge.

The psalmist explained that **no harm** or **disaster** can **befall** those who have made **the LORD** their **refuge** (mahEseh, “shelter from danger”; ...) because He has commissioned **angels** to care for them. Angels protect from physical harm and give believers strength to overcome difficulties, pictured here as wild lions and dangerous snakes. Satan, in tempting Christ, quoted 91:11-12 (Matt. 4:6), which shows that even God’s most marvelous promises can be foolishly applied.⁵⁶

Some would claim that this Old Testament passage should not be applied in modern times, but in Hebrews 1:14 the author of Hebrews does not seem to draw that distinction. That they are ministering spirits who minister to the saints is presented as a general truth of the Bible and should not be restricted to Bible times.

⁵⁴ Ryrie, p. 133.

⁵⁵ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1995, p. 1964.

⁵⁶ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, OT*, John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, Editors, Victor Books, 1983, 1985, electronic media.

Surely it is comforting to know that God may protect, provide, and encourage us through His angels, but this fact does not always guarantee such deliverance, and certainly we should never presume on this provision of God. So having considered the various ways angels minister, we should keep in mind that God does not always deliver us from danger or supply our needs in miraculous ways whether by angels or by His direct intervention. For His own sovereign and wise purposes, the opposite is sometimes His will as life clearly illustrates and Scripture declares (see Heb. 11:36-40).

But there is another truth regarding angels that needs to be kept in view. Just as people usually do not think of the punitive ministry of angels, so people, in their popular ideas about angels, often ignore the Scripture's teaching about the deception of Satan's evil angels (2 Cor. 11:14-15). That society is ignorant of this is not without reason. The reason lies in Satan's deception and in the vacuum of man's heart as he continues to seek answers apart from God and Scripture's revelation of God and His plan of salvation in Christ. As the arch deceiver and antagonist to God, to the church, and to mankind as whole, Satan is the master of disguise. Much of how society thinks today in its enchantment with angels is clearly a product of his masquerade as an angel of light with his angels who also disguise themselves in keeping with his purposes. Investigate what is being written in books and said in seminars and you will find numerous publications and teaching filled with what is nothing less than pure demonic deception. For more on this whole issue as it applies to today's fascination with angels, see the study, "Angels, God's Ministering Spirits" on our web page in the theology section.

The Watchfulness of Angels

The Fact of Their Watchfulness

Significantly, a number of passages speak of the angels as observers. Some are surprised by this truth, but the Bible teaches us that angels are spectators of God's activities in the world and that they are especially keen on observing the unfolding of His plan of redemption. Since a number of passages specifically address the fact angels are spectators of what God does, we would be remiss to ignore this biblical truth for there is certainly a reason and a lesson to be learned from

this (Job 38:7; Luke 15:10; 1 Cor. 4:9; 11:10; Eph. 3:10; Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:12).

The Objects of Their Watchfulness

As indicated previously, they observed God's creation and rejoiced (Ps. 38:7). At seeing the birth of Christ, the angels rejoiced in praise to God (Luke 2:13-14) and they witnessed the entirety of Jesus' life on earth (1 Tim. 3:16). They also observe God's joy when a sinner repents (Luke 15:10).⁵⁷ Angels are keenly interested in man's salvation in Christ and carefully observe God's manifold wisdom in the unfolding of His redemptive plan (1 Pet. 1:12; Eph. 3:10). In the statement, "things into which the angels long to look," "things" are those things that belong to our salvation (vs. 10), and "long to look" is the same word used of the actions of John and Peter and Mary when they stooped down to peer into the empty tomb (Luke 24:12; John 20:5, 11). The verb, *parakuptw*, "to bend over," conveys the idea of bending over to see something more clearly or to look intently (see also Jam. 1:24).

The Reasons for Their Watchfulness

The Two Kingdoms and the Angelic Conflict

A question that naturally arises is why are angels so deeply interested and observant of what is happening on this earth? First, as holy creatures they are concerned for the worship and glory of God that is His due as the holy and infinite Creator. This is clearly evident in Isaiah 6:3 where, in antiphonal chorus, seraphim sing of God's holiness, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." John states that in their devotion to God's worship the living creatures never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come" (NIV). Their devotion to God's glory becomes exceedingly prominent and specific in Revelation. In Revelation 4:8-11, their continuous praise evokes the praise of the twenty-four elders which is aimed at God's worthiness as the Sovereign Creator. Then in chapter 5:8-14, angels,

⁵⁷ The main point of verse 10 is that there is great joy in heaven (cf. vs. 7) when a sinner repents. Some would argue that the text does not say that angels rejoice, only that there is joy in their presence. They observe God's joy, but surely, angels who are devoted to God's will, also rejoice as we see them praising God in Luke 2 at the birth of Christ.

accompanied by the twenty-four elders (representatives of the church), direct their praise toward God's gracious work of salvation through the Lamb in view of His worthiness to open the seven seals. He alone is found worthy to open the seven-sealed book and break its seals (cf. Rev. 5:1 with 5:9f).

Though we are not told the exact contents of the seven-sealed book, written inside and on the back, it undoubtedly contains the story of man's loss of his lordship over the earth (Gen. 1:26) to Satan, the usurper, and its recovery through the God-man Savior, the Lion who is also the Lamb. This Lamb is alone able to accomplish what no one else in the universe is qualified and able to do. The following three truths form an important element of God's revelation:

(1) **God's Purpose Declared:** It was God's intention that man would rule over this earth under God's authority (Gen. 1:26; Ps. 8:4-6; Heb. 2:5-8a).

(2) **God's Purpose Delayed:** Because of the fall, as recorded in Genesis 3, Satan wrested the rule away from man (cf. Heb. 2:5 with 2:8b). God's intention was for man to rule over this earth, never angels, much less the fallen angels.

(3) **God's Purpose Fulfilled:** But as promised in Genesis 3:15, the Lamb breaks Satan's hold by means of His incarnation, sinless life, death, resurrection, ascension (see Heb. 2:9-14) and will one day recover that which was lost through the judgments of the seven seals as described in Revelation 6-19.

One of the key features of Revelation concerns the two kingdoms: the kingdom of the world (Satan's kingdom) and the kingdom of God. The words "king, kings, kingdom," etc., occur thirty times in twenty-five verses in this book. In view of the struggle between the two kingdoms, there is a joyous celebration of voices raised in heaven at the sounding of the seventh trumpet in anticipation of what the seventh trumpet would accomplish.⁵⁸

This surely includes the holy angels:

Revelation 11:15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has

⁵⁸ The seven trumpets proceed out of the seven seals and immediately following this final trumpet are the seven bowl judgments that result in Christ's return to earth, defeat of Satan's kingdom, and the establishment of Christ's rule on earth.

become *the kingdom* of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."

The issue of Satan's rebellion to God's authority may well explain Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 11:10 that a woman is to have a symbol of authority on her head because of the angels. This suggests that one of the areas angels observe is that of submission to authority. Submission glorifies God while rebellion dishonors God and promotes Satan's goals. At the root of the angels' keen interest in what God is doing today is the rebellion and fall of Satan. As observers, all the angels were present when Satan, in his quest to be like the Most High, sought to usurp God's sovereign rule (see Isa. 14:12-15). This was an offense to the glory of God. It appears from Revelation 12:3-4 that one-third of the angelic hosts chose to follow Satan. Because of Satan's sin, he was thrust out of his exalted place and became the great adversary of God and God's people (see Ezek. 28:11-19).⁵⁹ In addition, the Lord also explicitly tells us that the lake of fire was prepared for Satan and his angels (Matt. 25:41). Though a defeated foe (cf. Col. 2:15), Satan is not confined there now, but he and his fallen angels will be and this is a great point of anticipation in the Bible (cf. Rom. 16:20; Rev. 20:10).

Satan's Characterization as the Slanderer

An understanding of one of Satan's names is helpful here and is loaded with implications. The term, *devil*, as used so often of Satan, means, "slanderer, defamer, one who accuses falsely."⁶⁰ This name reveals him in one of his key characterizations in Scripture. As "the slanderer," he is one who defames the character of God and one of the ways he seeks to do this is by accusing believers (Rev. 12:10). The book of Job gives us a good illustration of his defaming accusations against believers and how, at the same time, he seeks to malign the character of God. When you

⁵⁹ "This section, with its superhuman references, apparently describes someone other than the human king of Tyre, namely, Satan. If so, Satan's unique privileges before his fall are described in verses 12-15 and the judgment on him in verses 16-19. You had the seal of perfection (v. 12). I.e., Satan was the consummation of perfection in his original wisdom and beauty." (Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1995, p. 1306).

⁶⁰ Greek, *diabolos*, "an accuser, a slanderer," from *diabollw*, "to accuse, malign."

read the first two chapters of Job, the true purpose of Satan's accusations become quickly evident. Satan's claim was that Job only worshipped God because of all God had given to him; it was not because Job loved God for who He was or because God deserved to be worshipped as the Holy and Sovereign Creator. Just take away all that he has and he will curse you, was the essence of Satan's accusation (cf. Job 1:6-11; 2:1-6).

Satan's Characterization of God

From the Bible's characterization of Satan as "adversary" (1 Pet. 5:8)⁶¹ and "the devil,"⁶² and from his activities as seen in Scripture, it seems only logical that Satan may have argued that God was unloving and that His judgment of Satan and his angels to the lake of fire was unfair and unjust. Shortly after the creation of Adam and Eve, the devil's attack on the character of God as unfair becomes immediately evident in the slanderous nature of his questions and statements to Eve in the temptation (Gen. 3:1-5). So today, from a world that lies under his deception (see John 12:31; 16:11; Eph. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:3-4), there is a common sentiment echoed among many who, rejecting God's Word, may say, "The God of the Bible is vengeful. How could a loving God send people to hell? I refuse to believe in a God like that."

A Reason for Man

Part of the reason for man's creation and for God's plan of salvation in Christ is to demonstrate the truth of God's character as wise, holy, just, loving, gracious, merciful, and good. In His holiness and justice, God had no other choice but to judge Satan and his angels to the lake of fire. The same is true with sinful man. But God is also merciful, gracious, and loving, so He provided a solution through the cross so that man could have eternal life. This gracious plan of love was not only anticipated in the Old Testament, but was actually first announced to the serpent (the devil in disguise) in Genesis 3:16, which is significant in view of the angelic conflict and the slanderous accusations of Satan. Man's redemption and the

⁶¹ "Adversary," the Greek *antidikos*, was used of a legal adversary, "an opponent in a lawsuit."

⁶² For more details on Satan, his origin, titles, etc., see the doctrine of Satanology on our web site.

recovery of paradise lost has always been based on what God would do through the seed of the woman, the Messiah Savior who would die as man's substitute, but also defeat Satan and, by implication, demonstrate Satan's slander as false (cf. Isa. 53; Rom. 3:21-26; Col. 2:10-15; Heb. 2:14-16).

The Scriptures disclose the truth that the angels learn much about God from His activities through the person and work of Christ and through the church, especially in the unfolding of God's plan of redemption. Concerning the sufferings of Christ, the glories that will follow, and the things announced to believers through those who preached the gospel by the Holy Spirit, Peter declared, "things into which angels long to look" (see 1 Pet. 1:11-12). Then, along a similar line Paul wrote,

Ephesians 3:8-11 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; 10 in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Consequently, the church becomes a means of unveiling both the manifold wisdom and grace of God to angels, for in Ephesians 2:4-7 Paul wrote:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Chafer quotes Otto Von Gerlach who pointed out:

By the revelation of Himself in Christ, by the institution of the Christian Church on earth, God after a manner hitherto unknown glorifies Himself before the heavenly principalities. They who until now had, filled with awe, been praising Him for the wonder of creation, now see His wisdom glorified in a new form in the

Christian communion through the manifold ways by which lost men are saved. Entirely new and inexhaustible wealth of divine wisdom was manifested in redemption.⁶³

Victory Anticipated

Revelation 4-5 sets forth heaven's perspective in preparation for the judgments that will follow on earth as described in chapters 6-19. It is these judgments that defeat Satan and his world system and establish God's Son on His throne on earth. In these two chapters, however, there is a strong emphasis on the holiness of God, His worthiness to receive glory and honor, and on the worthiness of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus, to open and pour out the seals and to reign and receive glory and honor. And who are also prominent in these two chapters? The angels!

In view of this scenario, we can see why God's holy angels are so keenly interested in our salvation because in it they observe the manifold wisdom, love, grace, and holiness of God (Eph. 3:10; 1 Pet. 1:12). This becomes even more of an issue when one considers the rebellion and accusations of Satan in light of the condescension of Christ whose entire life they witnessed (1 Tim. 3:16). To witness the submission and condescension of God incarnate, even to the death of the cross, was an awesome declaration of God's character as holy and immutable.

What amazing condescension! *Obeying his own law as if he were a mere creature, and in the attitude of a servant!* This was new. They had seen him as the governor of the universe; but never till now as a subject! *Encountering Satan in conflict and prolonged temptation!* This was new.⁶⁴

Think of this! They had seen Satan cast down from his exalted position and sentenced to the lake of fire because of his pride and rebellion, but in Christ's incarnation and submissive life, even to the cross, they have the ultimate example of God's holiness, love, grace, and mercy and the justness of Satan's sentence.

But what about the fallen angels? Evidently, there was a time of grace and testing for the angels

⁶³ Chafer, p. 25.

⁶⁴ Chafer, p. 22, cites Dr. William Cooke, *Christian Theology*, pp. 622-23.

before Satan's fall, but they now remain confirmed in their fallen state just as those who die without Christ will remain in their fallen state to face the Great White Throne Judgment and eternal separation from God.

The Angelic Conflict and the Moral Problem of Evil

Understanding the above scenario provides us with part of the answer to the age old question of how a God who is good could permit evil, especially if He is omniscient and omnipotent. Contrary to Scripture, which declares the omnipotence and omniscience of God, some have sought to answer the problem by claiming that though God is good, He was helpless to stop evil from happening. Though it is only by implication, the Bible alone gives us an answer to the problem of evil, which lies, in part at least, in the angelic conflict briefly described in the preceding paragraphs. Certain things are basic to a discussion of this issue.

Scripture reveals God to be perfect in holiness, love, benevolence, grace, and mercy. This means God cannot do evil because evil is contrary to His Holy character. For instance, God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). Further, He cannot tempt the creature to sin (Jam. 1:13). He cannot be the author of sin because He has judged all evil and to author sin would be contrary to His perfect justice and righteousness. God could not judge sin in the creature if He was the author of the creature's sin. Therefore, though allowed by God, evil did not originate from God. It originated from something outside of God.

According to the Bible, the original human sin as recorded in Genesis 3 is not the first sin in the universe. The Bible reveals the moral problem is related to: (1) the fall of Satan and his angels into sin; (2) Satan's characterization as the slandering adversary of God; (3) God's purpose for man to rule on the earth with the loss of that rule through man's temptation and fall into sin; and (4) man's redemption and the recovery of that rule through the sinless God-man Savior who bore the penalty for our sin.

In the study of this moral problem certain facts emerge. It is clear that God in creating angels and men created them as moral creatures with the power of choice. The sin problem is present when a moral creature chooses sin instead of

righteousness. This is the explanation for the fall of angels and the fall of men.⁶⁵

Scripture's revelation of Satan's fall, man's fall, and the ensuing angelic conflict envelops us in things far beyond our comprehension. Nevertheless, the Bible teaches that God created the angels and man. As suggested by the fellowship that can be observed in the Trinity between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God's very being necessitated that He bring forth creatures for fellowship, but He did not create these creatures as robots who have no choice. There would be no fellowship or glory with a mechanical robot that had no choice. God gave both angels and human beings personalities with intellect, emotion, and volition. By the exercise of this personality, both mankind and angels could have fellowship with God and bring glory to Him. But, though created perfect and without sin, freedom of choice also meant the possibility, known from eternity by God, that Satan and mankind could choose against God, which both did. So why did God allow it? Perhaps the answer lies in the aftermath of sin since God's glory is displayed even more. Just as nothing displays the splendor of a diamond in the light more than a backdrop of black velvet, so nothing could display the glory of God's mercy, goodness, grace, and love as much as the blackness of man's sin.

Because this perplexes the human mind, many reject the whole idea of God or postulate weakness to God or in some way find fault with God. But the Bible has some important words of warning regarding such a response and the story of Job, his trials, the activity of Satan and the good angels as mentioned in Job are instructive here. The book of Job is significant to questions regarding the moral problem of evil and the presence of suffering because of the insight it gives us into the adversarial activity of Satan and the activities of angels called "sons of God" (see Job 1:6-13; 2:1-7; 38:4-6).

Angels are mentioned as present and giving praise to God when God created the earth (Job 38:7), but in Job 1:6 and 2:1, the "sons of God" appear before God, undoubtedly as His attendants and submissive servants in adoration and praise

of the Almighty. But then Satan is suddenly introduced into the picture as the slandering accuser. Though the specific reason for Satan's appearance is not stated, the questions God asks of Satan makes the reason clear. He is there to carry on his slanderous activity in his ongoing conflict against the character of God.

Briefly, then, what the Bible teaches us about Satan and sin and suffering provides us with an answer to this moral dilemma. The book of Job with its revelation about Satan, the angels, Job's trials and his responses to his suffering add important insight to our understanding and response to the moral problem of evil.

Job was a man who suffered tremendously. His losses and pain were awful. So along came three friends who sought to counsel him, but with friends like these, who needs enemies? In essence, their counsel was that his suffering was caused by sin. And, of course, sometimes that is the cause of suffering, but personal sin is only one of the reasons Scripture gives for suffering. In the process of Job's dialogue with his three friends, Job sought to vindicate himself against their accusations. He sought to show he was innocent of any wrong that had caused his pain. And in essence, he was. But as this dialogue and Job's suffering continued over a prolonged period, Job began to become angry with God and he developed a demanding spirit. This seems evident by God's words to Job seen in chapters 38-40, but especially in the following verses:

Job 38:2-4 Who is this that darkens counsel By words without knowledge? 3 Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me! 4 Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding,

In other words, how absurd to think that a creature should become the critic of the Creator or of what He is doing as the Sovereign Lord of the universe. The next two chapters, then, develop this theme of God's wisdom and power.

Job 40:1-2 Then the LORD said to Job, "Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it."

Job then answered and said,

Job 40:4-5 Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth. 5 Once I have spoken, and I will not answer; Even twice, and I will add no more.

⁶⁵ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Lewis Sperry Chafer Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, Abridged Edition, John F. Walvoord, Editor, Donald K. Campbell, Roy B. Zuck, Consulting Editors, Victor Books, Wheaton, Ill., 1988, p. 289.

Though this was a start in the right direction, it is clear from what followed that Job was humbled but not yet repentant so God questioned him further. Why? May I suggest that when Job criticized God's ways or became demanding toward God he was in effect following in the footsteps of Satan in both finding fault and usurping God's position as governor of the world. In the next paragraph (vss. 6-14), one full of irony, God asks if Job can really perform those things that only God is able to do. Note verses 7-9:

Job 40:7-9. Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm, and said, 7 "Now gird up your loins like a man; I will ask you, and you instruct Me. 8 Will you really annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified? 9 Or do you have an arm like God, And can you thunder with a voice like His?"

Though the problem of evil and Satan baffles the human mind, only God's Word gives us a reasonable explanation as to the cause, course, and ultimate destiny of evil. Our need is to recognize that God is not only sovereign and infinitely wise, but submit in faith to the plan of God. The book of Revelation, a book filled with references to angels, gives us the end result – the final defeat of sin, death, and Satan with his fallen angels, and with paradise regained. Then God will wipe away every tear and the universe will know permanent joy and peace beyond our wildest dreams.

The very nature of the complexity of creation not only demands an adequate cause, a Creator, but it demonstrates His infinite wisdom and power (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:18-21). God is infinitely wise. He is the omniscient One in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And though God has revealed some things to us, He has obviously left much that is not revealed. We would simply not have the ability to grasp it in our present state (cf. Deut. 29:29). Regardless, it is vital for faith and practice that we come to the point where we not only recognize our thoughts and ways are far different from His, but that in faith we accept what He has revealed. Note the focus in the passage below.

Isaiah 55:6-9 Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. 8 "For My thoughts

are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. 9 "For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."

Does this mean we should not ask questions and look for answers to the mysteries of the universe? Of course not. But where God has given us revelation or where we find God's answers in the Bible, whether by explicit statement or by strong implicit arguments, our need is to humbly submit to what it teaches and put the things that still perplex us on the top shelf for later understanding. This, of course, is the crucial issue. What does the Bible really teach on any of these questions? Our tendency is to look at the Bible's answers through human reason and logic. Then, when it seems contrary to human reason, our tendency is to reject it or at least question it or twist the truth to suit our human logic. For instance, the doctrine of the trinity is *not explicitly* taught in the Bible, but it is *clearly taught implicitly* in Scripture. Other doctrines, like the incarnation, are beyond our ability to grasp but it is a doctrine *explicitly* stated in the Bible. So Isaiah wrote, "But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isa. 66:3b).

Lessons From the Angels

A study of the angels, both good and bad, furnishes us with a number of lessons as to how we should and should not live both negatively and positively. The apostle Paul provides a precedent for this in his warning regarding selecting novices for elders in 1 Timothy 3:6-7.

Negative Lessons

Satan, as the anointed cherub, was not only created perfect, but he was exceedingly beautiful. His high position and beauty, of course, were the products of God's grace and creative powers, not Satan's. Nevertheless, he became puffed up with pride over his own beauty and power. He forgot his creatureliness and wanted to become like God (cf. Ezek. 28:11-15; Isa. 14:12-13). For his pride and rebellion, he was judged and cast from his exalted position as the anointed cherub and sentenced to the lake of fire, the place of his eventual doom. As such, Satan not only becomes the classic illustration of the temptation and foolishness of

pride in the creature, but pride becomes one of his chief snares by which he seeks to cause trouble among the people of God who are so prone to become puffed up over their own abilities or roles or over the abilities and roles of others, all of which are gifts of God. In view of this ever present danger, Paul warned against selecting a new convert to a position of authority, "lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Tim. 3:6-7).

Satan and his fallen angels also warn us against the evil nature and the dangers of rebellion in contrast with submission and obedience. Perhaps there is no place where this is more clearly stated than in 1 Samuel 15:22-23. Here the seriousness of disobedience (vs. 22), which is essentially defined as rebellion (vs. 23), is underscored by the comparisons made to divination and idolatry. Samuel compares it to divination (Hebrew, *qesem*, a general term for various occult practices or spiritism. For some of the various forms of divination see Deuteronomy 18:10-11.). Divination like idolatry is demonic (see 1 Cor. 10:19-22). Behind the occult and idolatry is the work of Satan, the rebel of rebels.

Ultimately, Satan and his evil angels, the demons, furnish examples of all that is evil along with the hideous consequences of evil. Satan is a rebel, a liar, a murderer, a deceiver, a slanderer, a tempter, a distorter, and one who opposes all that is good, righteous, and holy. As a murderer from the beginning and the father of lies (John 8:44) who tempted Eve in Eden, he ultimately becomes the father of all that is evil.

This, of course, does not abdicate man from his responsibility to choose what is good nor can we blame Satan for our own sin, though he is always on the prowl to promote sin and to deceive and tempt us. Though Satan tempts us constantly, our temptation to sin ultimately stems from our own lusts that wage war in our souls (Jam. 1:14; 1 Pet. 2:11; Eph. 2:3).

Positive Lessons

The many references to God's holy angels in the Bible are chiefly records of their many activities, but two things quickly stand out. They are constantly seen in the activities of worshipful adoration of God and in humble service, totally

submissive to the will of God. If these celestial beings, with all their strength, holiness, and knowledge of God are so committed, should they not be a motivation and an example to us?

It was after Isaiah saw the holy seraphim in worship and humility (suggested by the covering of their feet) exalting the Lord, that he then saw and confessed his own sinfulness and became a willing servant. It was then, in answer to the Lord's question, "Whom shall I send?" that the prophet said, "Here am I, send me" (see Isa. 6:1-8). Following the joyous news of Messiah's birth, the experience of seeing Jesus in Bethlehem, and hearing the heavenly hosts of angels praising God, it was the shepherds who, following the example of the angels, went back "glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them" (Luke 2:20).

A consciousness of the reality of the vast hosts of angelic being – the benefit derived from the good, and the opposition of the bad – can be gained only through meditation upon the Scriptures that record these truths, and through prayer.⁶⁶

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⁶⁶ Chafer, p. 27.