

Angels

1) What are angels?

A) Angels are spirit beings—they do not have physical, material bodies. The clearest statement regarding the nature of angels is found in Hebrews 1:14 where the writer says, “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”¹ Because angels are spirits, they are without gender, being neither male or female.

B) Angels are personal beings—they can be spoken to and interacted with (cf. Gen 18; Heb 13:2), and they have emotions, intelligence and will (2 Samuel 14:20; Revelation 22:9).

C) Angels are moral beings—they have the capacity for moral choice. Some of them (simply called “angels”) are obedient to God and carry out His will, while others, fallen angels (normally called “demons”), disobeyed, fell from their holy position, and now stand in active opposition to the work and plan of God (Matthew 25:31; Luke 1:26; John 8:44; 1 John 3:8–10).

2) Where did angels come from?

A) Angels were created by God. This is implied in Psalm 148:2, 5: “Praise Him, all His angels, praise Him, all His heavenly hosts...Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created” (NIV). It is reasonable to conclude that the angels were created at the beginning of the six days of creation (cf. Genesis 2:1–2; Job 38:4–7). Apparently the angels were all created at one time, since they do not have the power to reproduce as humans do (Matthew 22:30).

3) Are there different types of angels?

A) There is little definite information on this subject. We do know that there are “archangels,” who evidently are of higher stature than ordinary angels. The Bible only uses this term twice, once in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and once in Jude 1:9. Michael is the only angel identified by name as an archangel. Although Gabriel is often thought of as an archangel, there is no text in Scripture that confirms this belief. Nor are we told how many archangels there are (although it seems that there may be several; cf. Daniel 10:13).

B) Cherubim and seraphim are winged creatures that appear in Scripture and make their most memorable appearances in the visions of Ezekiel (1:4–28, 10:3–22), Isaiah

(6:2–6), and John (Revelation 4:7). Although they are not specifically called angels, it seems reasonable to conclude that they are among the spiritual creatures designated by the general term angel.

(1) Cherubim (also called cherubs) are revealed as powerful guards or attendants to the divine throne. God placed cherubim and a flaming sword at the garden of Eden to guard the way of the tree of life (Genesis 3:24). In the tabernacle and also the temple, gold cherubim on the mercy seat signified the presence of God (Exodus 37:7–9; Numbers 7:89; Psalm 80:1).

(2) Seraphim only appear in Isaiah’s vision. Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on a throne, and seraphim stood over the throne crying out, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: His glory is the fullness of the whole earth” (Isaiah 6:3, literal translation).

C) Attempts have been made to devise an organizational pattern for the angelic hierarchy, but it is impossible to be certain with so little data. They appear to be organized into various ranks, orders and positions. The Scriptures speak of the “assembly” and “council” of the angels (Psalm 89:5, 7), of their organization for battle (Revelation 12:7), of a king over the demon-locusts (Revelation 9:11) and of a demonic “Prince of Persia” (Daniel 10). They are also given governmental classifications which indicate organization and ranking (Ephesians 3:10—good angels; and 6:12—demons).

4) What do angels look like?

A) Angels are normally invisible to the human eye (Numbers 22:31; 2 Kings 6:17). When they do manifest themselves in a visible form, it is usually to speak to and interact with human beings. Descriptions in the Bible of the appearance of angels varies from the fantastic to the ordinary. Indeed, Hebrews 13:2 tells us that angels can appear so much like human beings that it is possible to have them in your home and never realize who they are. Here are some passages which describe the appearance of angels:

(1) Abraham’s Visitors (Genesis 18–19). These angels are described as looking like men. There is no indication of anything strange about their appearance.

(2) Angels at Christ’s Tomb (Matthew 28; Luke 24). These angels are described as looking like men. Their bodies and faces shone like lightning and their clothes were a dazzling white.

(3) Daniel's Angel (Daniel 10). Daniel's angel appeared as a man dressed in linen clothing, with a belt of pure gold around his waist. His body looked like a precious gem [beryl]. His face flashed like lightning, and his eyes flamed like torches. His arms and feet shone like polished bronze, and his voice roared like a vast multitude of people.

(4) Cherubim (Ezekiel 1; 10). Cherubim are described as having four faces. The face in front is like a man, the face on the right is like a lion, the face on the left is like an ox and the face in back is like an eagle. They have two pairs of wings. One pair spreads out from the middle of the back. The other pair is used to cover the body. They have legs like a man, but their feet are cloven like calves' feet, which shine like burnished brass. They have four human hands, one located under each wing.

(5) Seraphim (Isaiah 6). Seraphim are described as having six wings. Two are used to cover their face, two to cover their feet and two are used to fly.

(6) The Four Living Creatures (Revelation 4). There is some debate among scholars as to whether these creatures are seraphim or a distinct kind of angel. They are described as being covered with eyes, both in front and behind, and having six wings like a seraphim. One looked like a lion, one looked like a ox, one had a human face and the last looked like an eagle.

5) How many angels are there?

A) There are large numbers of angels. Scripture has various ways of indicating their numbers: "myriads" (Deuteronomy 33:2); "tens of thousands and thousands of thousands" (Psalm 68:17); "twelve legions" (36,000 to 72,000—the size of the Roman legion varied between 3,000 and 6,000; Matthew 26:53). While there is no reason to take any of these figures as exact numbers, it is clear that the angels are a very large group.

6) Why were angels created?

A) Praise. Angels continually praise and glorify God (Revelation 5:11–12; 7:11; 8:1–4). While this activity usually takes place in God's presence, on at least one occasion it took place on earth—at the birth of Jesus the angels proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:13–14).

B) Communication. Angels are often used to communicate God's message to humans. This role is in keeping with the meaning of the word angel ("messenger"). Two angels warned Lot about the coming destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19). Gabriel appeared and spoke to Zacharias (Luke 1:13–20) and to Mary (Luke 1:26–28). Angels also spoke to Philip (Acts 8:26), Cornelius (Acts 10:3–7), Peter (Acts 11:13; 12:7–11) and Paul (Acts 27:23).

C) Ministry. Angels minister to believers, both physically and spiritually. Angels ministered to Jesus after His temptation (Matthew 4:11) and during His stress in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:43). In the early church it was an angel that delivered the apostles (Acts 5:19) and later Peter (Acts 12:6–11) from prison. Angels take a great interest in the spiritual welfare of believers, rejoicing at their conversion (Luke 15:10) and serving them in their needs (Hebrews 1:14). Angels are spectators of our lives (1 Corinthians 4:9; 1 Timothy 5:21), and are present within the church (1 Corinthians 11:10). At the death of believers, they convey them to heaven (Luke 16:22).

D) Judgment. Angels execute judgment on the enemies of God. The angel of the Lord brought death to 185,000 Assyrians in one night (2 Kings 19:35). It was an angel of the Lord that killed Herod (Acts 12:23). The Book of Revelation is full of prophecies regarding the judgment to be administered by angels during the Tribulation (Revelation 8:6–9:21; 16:1–17; 19:11–14).

E) Warfare. Scripture reveals that there are times when angels and demons engage in warfare. This warfare takes place in the spirit realm, but seems to correspond in some way with the actual geography of earth. In Daniel 10 the angel tells Daniel that the demon Prince of Persia fought him and delayed him from carrying out his mission of bringing an answer to Daniel's prayer. In Revelation 12:7–9 we are told of a war between Satan and Michael the Archangel. These spiritual conflicts are evidently part of how God carries out His work on earth, but the lack of information leaves us unable to draw many conclusions.

7) Do we have guardian angels?

A) The Bible does not state whether each believer has a specific guardian angel. While it is possible given various Scriptures (Matthew 18:10; Psalm 34:7; 91:11), there is no way to know for certain. At the very least, we do know that angels guard and protect Christians from harm.

8) Are there bad angels?

A) Originally, all angels were created holy and without sin, but not long after the creation of the world, there was a rebellion by an angel we now call Satan. Although we are not told much about this rebellion, it seems that Satan was lifted up by his own beauty and sought to exalt himself above God. Scripture tells us that he was able to convince one-third of all the angels to join in his rebellion (Revelation 12:4). God cast Satan and his followers (which we refer to as demons) from heaven (Luke 10:18). There is no redemption for the angels who sinned (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6). Why this is true we are not told. We will study more about Satan and the demons in another lesson.

9) How powerful are the angels?

A) Angels have superhuman power. This is taught in three ways in the Bible:

(1) The titles assigned to some of them—principalities, powers, authorities, dominions, thrones (Ephesians 6:12).

(2) Direct assertions; for example, “angels, although they are stronger and more powerful [than humans]” (2 Peter 2:11, NIV); “Praise the Lord, you His angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding” (Psalm 103:20, NIV).

(3) The effects attributed to their agency—see 2 Chronicles 32:21; Acts 12:7–11.

B) Angels possess greater knowledge than humans. This is indicated by their presence at some of the heavenly councils, their involvement in conveying revelation (Galatians 3:19) and their interpretation of visions (as in Daniel and Zechariah). Their knowledge is limited however (see Matthew 24:36), and they evidently learn by observing human actions and by studying the Word of God (1 Peter 1:12; 1 Corinthians 4:9; Ephesians 3:10).

C) Angels derive their power from God and they are restricted to acting within the limits of His permission. This is true even of Satan, whose ability to afflict Job was directly controlled by God (Job 1:12; 2:6).

10) Should we worship angels?

A) Angels are created beings just like humans. They are not divine and worshipping them is explicitly forbidden (see Colossians 2:18; Revelation 19:10; 22:9). The apostle John, who received revelation about future events from an angel, fell on his face to worship the angel, but the angel quickly told John, “No, don’t worship me. For I am a servant of God just like you...Worship God” (Revelation 19:10; 22:9, NLT). Angels are

powerful beings, but, like us, they are only servants of the living God who alone deserves our worship. This means that 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 angels.

11) Who is the “Angel of the LORD”?

A) There are numerous references in the Bible to the “angel of the LORD” or “the angel of God” (see Genesis 16:7–14; 18; 22:11; Exodus 3:2; 14:19, etc.). In some of these passages, the angel of the Lord is identified as God (see Genesis 31:11–13; Exodus 3:2–6; Josh 5:13–15). However, in other passages, the angel is not God (see Luke 1:11–19). Because of this, we need to be careful in our identification of the “angel of the LORD.”

(1) In the passages where the angel of the LORD is God, many scholars and theologians believe that it is a Christophany—the appearance of the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ.