

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

42 What Does the Bible Say About Angels?

Scripture: Psalm 91:1-12; Hebrews 1:4-14

A professor by the name of Johnston Ross once visited a furniture store in West London. The owner was a Jew, who noticed that his customer wore clerical dress. They began to talk of religious matters. As the professor mounted his bicycle and said, "Good-bye," the dealer called after him in Hebrew: "Peace be unto you." Because he used the plural form he actually said, "Peace be unto both of you." The professor's curiosity was aroused. He stopped to ask, "Why did you put it so? Is there another that you wish peace to?" "Yes", came the answer, "Peace be to you and to the angel over your shoulder." You see, that Jewish furniture store owner in far off London was a man who read and believed what his Old Testament had to say about angels.

Of course, not everyone today shares his belief. I think we can say that most people feel somewhat uncomfortable when the subject of angels is introduced. This is a scientific age in which we live and the possibility of the existence of spiritual beings, as distinct from physical chemical life systems we are familiar with, seems remote. The criteria and the techniques employed by science are not capable of observing and measuring spirits. For this reason many have felt it more realistic or reasonable to conclude that angels do not exist. Even some Christians find the doctrine somewhat of an embarrassment. They do not see the need for believing in angels. They feel more comfortable with those doctrines which constitute the mainstream of Christian theology. Angels just do not seem that important. Furthermore, many theologians and professors do not believe in the existence of angels. In seminaries and divinity schools today future ministers are taught that angels and their ministrations are at best a medieval concept. The feeling is that we need no longer believe in angels or speak of them to express Christian belief and doctrine.

I want to suggest to you this morning that there are at least three very worthwhile reasons for our seeking to know more about angels. It is my feeling that angels ought not to be dismissed from our thinking because the Bible speaks about them so frequently. They have an important place in Scripture and it would seem to me that God wants us informed about them for that reason. Also,

we ought to be informed about angels because of their present ministry among us and because we will share our eternity with them. Angels are mentioned 108 times in the Old Testament and 165 times in the New Testament. This morning let us turn to several of these passages with the desire that their teaching will be a means of strengthening our faith.

I. THE EXISTENCE OF ANGELS:

The only ways for us to be informed concerning the existence and work of angels are by divine revelation and by direct communication. The question is not resolved by what we think is worthy of our belief or is not worthy. The question is finally answered by appeal to Scripture. The human mind is not capable of either proving or disproving the existence and purpose of angels.

We might do well to realize that people who dismiss the existence of angels because they believe the doctrine old fashioned or non-scientific take issue with theistic thought which has come to us through the centuries. The significance of the Hebrew passage (1:4-14) we have already read lies in the fact that the writer set himself to prove the superiority of Jesus over the angels. This was because of the high place angels had in the Jewish thinking of his day. The godly men of the Jewish nation believed that God first gave the law to angels who in turn passed it on to Moses because no man could possibly have such direct communication with God. (Acts 7:38, 53; Galatians 3:19) At least, this was their belief in New Testament times. We may go on to say that the Christian Church has always believed in angels. However, our appeal is not to the ancient rabbis nor to the church fathers or those who followed. Our appeal is to Scripture and it is here that our belief rests. When we turn to the Scriptures, we find that there is no reason at all for not believing in angels. Two classes of angels are mentioned in the Bible. There are those angels who we might identify as **God's Faithful**. These are angels who did not follow Satan in his rebellion. These angels are continually before God beholding his face and awaiting his instructions. (Matthew 18:10; John 1:51)

The faithful angels rejoice in God's works as indicated in Job 38:7 and Luke 15:10. They execute God's judgment as seen in Acts 12:23 and II Kings 19:35. In this last reference a king's prayer is answered with the coming of an angel to smite the Assyrian army. Other references having to do with the execution of God's wrath are Genesis 19:12-13 and II Thessalonians 1:7-8. It appears the faithful angels also are engaged in some way in studying the revelations God has

made of himself. This is noted in I Peter 1:12. The second category of angels spoken of in Scripture we may refer to as **Satan's Fallen**. Three ranks of evil beings are noted by Bible writers. First, there is the devil. Second, there are fallen angels. Lastly, there are demons. The word translated "devils" in our English Bibles should be "demons." There is only one devil. Jesus cast out demons, not devils.

When Lucifer fell according to Isaiah 14:12-15 it appears that other bright and perfect beings chose to follow him. There is a description of the great dragon in Revelation 12:4. Dragon means serpent, and this was the form in which he appeared to Eve. We read in this verse that the dragon's tail "*draweth*" (ASV) a third part of the stars of heaven. Some scholars believe the inference here is to the fact that a third of the heavenly beings fell at the time of Satan and are now his fallen companions and servants. Jude 6 informs us that they did not keep their first estate. II Peter 2:4 explains that they "*sinned.*"

The Bible leaves no doubt as to the existence of angels. Scores of references might be cited. Genesis 24:7; I Kings 19:5; I Chronicles 21:15; and II Chronicles 32:21 are but a few samples. Overall, angels are either fallen or faithful. Fallen angels will be judged by believers according to I Corinthians 6:3. Some even now are bound until the day of judgment. (II Peter 2:4) Some are free to serve Satan. (Ephesians 6:12) We can safely say this morning that anyone who respects the authority of the Word of God must believe in the existence of angels.

II. THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF ANGELS:

Last week we studied about the personality and work of Satan. We spoke of the fact that for many people the whole concept of Satan is ridiculous and laughable. Unfortunately, the doctrine of angels suffers also from being misunderstood. They are often thought of as having real bodies which have wings projecting from behind. People sometimes envision their becoming angels in the afterlife. There is also the unwarranted connotation of weakness and ineffectiveness associated with angels. There are these and other mistaken ideas having to do with angels. To the contrary, what do the Scriptures say?

A. Angels Are Created Beings:

They were created by and for the Lord Jesus Christ. Psalm 148:2 instructs us, "*Praise ye him, all his angels.*" Verse 5 continues, "*Let them praise the name of the Lord, For He commanded and they were created.*" This same truth is found in Colossians 1:16, "*For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and*

that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him." Bible scholars have long felt that the reference to thrones, dominions, principalities and powers here is specifically describing the angelic realm. Angels are created beings which means they are finite and limited in what they can do.

B. Angels Are Spiritual Beings:

They belong to a company, not a race. Hebrews 1:14 tells us that they are ministering spirits. This is taken from Psalm 104:4 where, speaking of God, it says, *"Who maketh his angels spirits."* This does not have to mean they are disembodied spirits. We do know that they appeared in visible, if not human form. (Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:26; John 20:12) Jesus gave qualification to the spirit-body in Luke 24:39. From the words of the Lord in Luke 20:35 it is believed that angels are sexless. The human race became an actuality through propagation. The company of angels was complete when they were created. This took place before the earth was formed. (Job 38:4-7) They were created all at the same time and without number according to Daniel 7:10 and Hebrews 12:22

C. Angels Are Beings of Great Intelligence and Power:

In the ancient language of the New Testament, the word for angel is *"aggeloi."* In the Hebrew of the Old Testament, it is the word *"mal'akim."* Both words mean messenger. Angels are special agents of God created for the purpose of performing His will. As such they excel in strength and the ability to reason. Psalm 103:20 reads, *"Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word."* David was likened to *"an angel of God...to discern good and bad."* The angel who rolled back the heavy stone from Christ's tomb had a countenance "like lightening." (Matthew 28:2-3) See also II Samuel 14:17; II Thessalonians 1:7; II Peter 2:11) Matthew 24:36 implies that the knowledge of angels is above that of man.

D. Angels Are Moral and Deathless Beings:

Several more characteristics of angels can be noted from the pages of Scripture. They possess a language of their own. (I Corinthians 13:1) They travel at speeds comparable to lightening. (Ezekiel 1:14) They need no rest. (Revelation 4:8) They are meek. (II Peter 2:11; Jude 9) They exist in great numbers. (Psalm 68:17; Matthew 26:53) We might note here that a Roman

legion was made up of between 3,000 and 6,000 men. In Revelation 5:11 the reference is to ten thousand times ten thousand. The impression given here is that there are many angels. Angels are also deathless. (Luke 20:35-36) Angels are moral and holy beings. (Matthew 25:31; Mark 8:38)

E. Angels Appear to Be Organized in Ranks of Power and Authority:

Those stationed at the entrance to the Garden of Eden were cherubim. (Genesis 3:24) The Old Testament refers to such cherubim 85 times. Ezekiel, chapter 1, speaks of them. Seraphim are mentioned only in Isaiah 6:2. Gabriel is described in Luke 1:19. He appears to have a place of prominence which enabled him to appear in the immediate presence of God. We also read of Michael, who is called the archangel. (Daniel 10:13) He is also spoken of in Jude 9 and Revelation 12:7. There appears to be a hierarchy among the angels. There are principalities and powers (Romans 8:38), rulers of darkness (Ephesians 6:12), assemblies (Psalm 89:7), heavenly hosts (Luke 2:13), princes and chief princes (Daniel 10:13, 20), and watchers (Daniel 4:13-23).

III. THE WORK OF ANGELS:

Angels have an important assignment in behalf of the people of God in the world. Of course their function is to praise and worship God as we noted earlier. But that sounds so theoretical and impractical as far as our lives are concerned. What are we able to believe about angels that will have significance for our lives as we seek to live for the Lord.

A. Angels Are Present With Those Who Are Heirs Of Salvation:

Psalm 91; 1,2 directly assert that ministering angels preserve from danger the people of God. This is also clearly taught in Hebrews 1:13-14. II Kings 6:15-17 speaks of protection from one's enemies. The mouths of the lions were closed when Daniel's life was in danger. (Daniel 6:22) The angel of the Lord protected Peter on at least two occasions. (Acts 5:19; 12:8, 11) It is not stated that there is a definite angel for every individual believer. It is enough to know that angels do have this ministry to all of God's people.

B. Angels Are Able to Encourage in Times of Hardship:

In Acts 27:23-24 the Apostle Paul is reassured of God's presence and protection in time of need. What a source of comfort to know that as we live in a world of danger and uncertainty our lives are in the hands of God and

that His angels watch over us. We are immortal until our work is done. No maniac or so called accident can take our lives until God allows it to happen. We are in His hands. He has delegated our keeping to His angels.

C. Angels Have Been Used to Reveal God's Wisdom and Direction:

This was the experience of Zacharias in Luke 1:11-13. We have a hint from Scripture that angels are somehow present in the church. (I Timothy 5:21; Revelation 1:20) The Apostle Paul wrote to the women at Corinth and he gave them certain instructions. The instructions were for this reason: *"because of the angels in your midst."* See also Acts 8:26 and 10:3-6.

D. Angels Are Present in the Death Chamber:

Have you ever wondered what the moment of death will be like? I have. It is a matter of leaving that which is familiar and stepping into that which is completely unknown. What is going to happen? How will we know what to do? So many question's might be raised about that big moment in life. Ah, but we have it from the Word of God that angels have the ministry of carrying believers to their home with the Lord. Luke 16:22 describes the experience of Lazarus.

E. Angels Have Not The Joy Of Redemption:

Angels might be defined as spirit-beings of a higher order than man and lower than God. But there is something angels can never have even as close as they are to God. They will never be able to love Jesus in quite the same way as we do. We have the realization of being delivered from so great a death. (I Peter 1:12; Ephesians 3:10) No, we will never be angels. But there is a way our experience exceeds theirs.

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