

Concerning Angels

A Supplement to the Sermon on Hebrews 1:5-14 (given at Living Way on 12/4/2011)

- I. What the Bible Teaches With Regard to Angels
 - A. It is the teaching of Scripture that God is surrounded by spirit beings who worship Him and serve His will
 1. These spirit beings make up God's heavenly entourage (like the courtiers and servants in the hall of a great king)
 2. They serve God's purposes in a variety of ways:
 - a. Delivering messages
 - b. Enacting judgments and punishments against the enemies of God and His people
 - c. Protecting God's people
 - d. Fighting for the cause of God as a celestial army
 - B. *"Angels are created, spiritual beings with moral judgment and high intelligence, but without physical bodies"* (Wayne Grudem)
 1. Angels have not always existed; they are a part of the universe that God created in the beginning (Gen 1:1)
 - a. Ezra says, *"You are the LORD, you alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host...and the host of heaven worships you"* (Neh 9:6)
 - b. Ps 148:2,5 - *"Praise him, all his angels...Let them praise the name of the Lord! For he commanded and they were created"*)
 2. Angels exercise moral judgment
 - a. Scripture teaches that some of the angels sinned and fell from their positions (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6)
 - b. These became the demons
 3. Their high intelligence is seen throughout Scripture
 - a. They speak to people (Matt 28:5; Acts 12:6-11)
 - b. They sing praise to God (Rev 4:11; 5:11)
 4. Since angels are "spirits" (Heb 1:14) or spiritual creatures, they do not ordinarily have physical bodies (Luke 24:39 - *"For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have"*)
 - a. Therefore, they cannot usually be seen by us - unless God gives us a special ability to see them (Num 22:31; 2 Kings 6:17; Luke 2:13 - *"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God..."*)
 - b. In their ordinary activities of guarding and protecting us (Ps 34:7; 91:11; Heb 1:14), and joining with us in worship to God (Heb 12:22), they are invisible
 - c. However, from time to time angels took on a bodily form to appear to various people in Scripture
 - C. Scripture indicates that there is rank and order among the angels

1. One angel, Michael, is called an “archangel” in Jude 9, a title that indicates rule or authority over other angels
 - a. He is called *“one of the chief princes”* in Dan 10:13
 - b. Michael also appears to be a leader in the angelic army: *“Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated”* (Rev 12:7-8)
 2. Paul tells us that the Lord will return from heaven *“with the archangel’s call”* (1 Thess 4:16)
 - a. Whether this refers to Michael (as the only archangel)
 - b. Or whether there are others, Scripture does not say
 3. Only two angels are specifically named in Scripture
 - a. Michael is mentioned in Jude 9 and Rev 12:7-8 as well as in Dan 10:13,21
 - b. The angel Gabriel is mentioned in Dan 8:16 and 9:21 as a messenger who comes from God to speak to Daniel
 - (1) Gabriel is also identified as God’s messenger to Zechariah and Mary in the gospel of Luke
 - (2) The angel answers Zechariah, *“I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God”* (Luke 1:19)
 - (3) Then we read, *“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin...and the virgin’s name was Mary”* (Luke 1:26-27)
- D. Though Scripture does not give us a figure for the number of angels God created, it is apparently a very great number
1. We read that God on Mount Sinai *“came from the ten thousands of holy ones with flaming fire at his right hand”* (Deut 33:2)
 2. We also learn that, *“The chariots of God are twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands”* (Ps 68:17)
 3. When we worship we come into the presence of *“innumerable angels”* (Heb 12:22)
 4. Their number is even more strikingly emphasized in Rev 5:11, where John says, *“I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands”*
 - a. *“Myriads”* – *“ten thousand”* or *“an immense number”*
 - b. This expression indicates an amazingly large number
 - c. An innumerable assembly of angelic beings praising God
- E. Angels apparently have very great power
1. They are called *“you mighty ones who do His word”* (Ps 103:20)
 2. Fear is often the first response of those who encounter an angel
 - a. Dan 8:17 – *“I was frightened and fell on my face”*

- b. Luke 1:12-13 – *“And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. (13) But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah...’”*
 - c. Luke 1:30 – *“And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.’”*
 - d. Luke 2:9-10 – *“And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. (10) And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not...’”*
 - e. Matt 28:3-5 – *“His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. (4) And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. (5) But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid...’”*
3. Angels are seemingly *“greater in might and power”* than rebellious human beings (2 Peter 2:11; cf. Matt 28:2)
 4. At least for the time of their earthly existence, human beings are made *“lower than the angels”* (Heb 2:7)
 5. Though the power of angels is great, it is not infinite
 - a. Their power is used to battle against the evil demonic powers under the control of Satan
 - b. Dan 10:13 and Rev 12:7-8; 20:1-3
 6. Nonetheless, when the Lord returns, we will be raised to a position higher than that of angels (1 Cor 6:3)
- F. The biblical teaching on the existence of angels is a constant reminder to us that there is an unseen world that is very real
- G. Scripture sees angels as God’s servants who carry out some of His plans in the earth
1. They bring God’s messages to people (Luke 1:11-19; Acts 8:26; 10:3-8,22; 27:23-24)
 2. They carry out some of God’s judgments
 - a. Bringing a plague upon Israel (2 Sam 24:16-17)
 - b. Killing the leaders of the Assyrian army (2 Chron 32:21)
 - c. Striking King Herod Agrippa dead because he did not give God glory (Acts 12:23)
 - d. They pour out bowls of God’s wrath on the earth (Rev 16:1)
 3. When Jesus Christ returns, angels will come with Him as a great army accompanying their King (Mt 16:27; Lk 9:26; 2 Thess 1:7)
- H. Angels also patrol the earth as God’s representatives (Zech 1:10-11) and carry out war against demonic forces (Dan 10:13; Rev 12:7-8)
1. John in his vision saw an angel coming down from heaven, and he records that the angel *“seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit...”*(Rev 20:1-3)

2. When Christ returns, an archangel will proclaim His coming (1 Thess 4:16; cf. Rev 18:1-2,21; 19:17-18)
- I. Scripture makes it clear that God wants us to be aware of the existence of angels and of the nature of their activity
 1. Though we do not ordinarily see or hear evidence of this heavenly worship, Scripture teaches that angels join us in the worship of God (Heb 12:22-23)
 2. We should be aware that angels are watching our obedience or disobedience to God through the day (1 Cor 11:10; 1 Tim 5:21)
- J. The Bible also contains warnings with regard to spiritual beings
 1. We are warned against receiving false doctrine from supposed angels (2 Cor 11:14; Gal 1:8)
 - a. Any claim to have received additional revelation from angels today should be immediately rejected as false
 - b. Whether Islam or Mormonism
 2. We are not to worship angels (Rev 19:10; Col 2:18))
 3. We are not to pray to angels (1 Tim 2:5)
 4. We are not to seek to have an encounter with angels (longing for them to appear to us) – avoid an unhealthy curiosity
- II. The Doctrine of Angels that Developed in Intertestamental Judaism
 - A. Angels became increasingly prominent in Jewish theology throughout the intertestamental period (400 B.C. to 4 B.C.)
 1. Angels were thought to serve as mediators between God and human beings
 2. There developed the belief that angels served as the first link in the chain of mediation of Torah between God and the people of Israel
 - a. A tradition with which the author of Hebrews is familiar
 - b. He refers to the Law as the “*message declared by angels*” (2:2)
 - B. Speculation about the significance of angels grew throughout the period between the end of the Old Testament and the first century A.D.
 1. In particular, their function as mediators
 - a. They stand in the presence of God
 - b. Therefore, they were thought to be well placed to help secure God’s favor for those further removed from Him
 2. Intertestamental literature (not viewed as inspired or authoritative) speak of angels directing the prayers of the righteous to God – that they serve an intercessory role (in this literature, specific names are give to other angels – this has no support in Scripture)
 - a. Tobit 12:15 (second century B.C.) – “*I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the saints and enter into the presence of the glory of the Holy One.*”

- b. First Enoch 9:1-3 (early second century B.C.) – *“And then Michael, Uriel, Raphael, and Gabriel looked down from heaven... [and heard the cry of those on earth]...now to you, the holy ones of heaven, the souls of men make their suit, saying, ‘Bring our cause before the Most High.’”*
- C. During this period, there also developed the idea that angels served a priestly function in a heavenly temple
 - 1. The angels were said to serve as priests and ministers of the courts of the heavenly temple, of which the ministry of Levi is a reflection
 - 2. Jubilees 31:14 (mid-second century B.C.) describes the Levites as those called *“to serve in His sanctuary as the angels of the presence and as the holy ones”*
- D. The author of Hebrews may be addressing this issue in his presentation of the Son’s superiority over the angels
 - 1. Just as the Son, Jesus Christ, stands closer to God than the faithful servant Moses (Heb 3:1-6)
 - 2. So, He also stands in closer proximity to God than even the *“angels of the presence”*